Wolfhart Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology by Fred Sanders from Theology For The Future

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Chapter 5

Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology

Fred Sanders

Introduction

Great theologians can be read in two ways: for their mere Christianity or for their distinctive ideas. One can read Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, for example, and learn from them the content of the Christian faith, while of course noting that each of them handles the same material in their own ways. But one can also read them specifically for their Thomism and Calvinism *avant la lettre*, that is, for their distinguishing and characteristic ideas. Wolfhart Pannenberg ranks among the great theologians in terms of scope, rigor, and insight. His trinitarian theology can be read in these two ways: on the one hand, he is fluent in the entire intellectual tradition of trinitarian theology and offers a representative modern restatement of it, and on the other hand there is something distinctively and peculiarly Pannenbergian about his doctrine of the Trinity. All of the motifs and commitments that are characteristic of Pannenberg's thought are evident in this tract of his theology; in fact, most of them come especially to the fore here. This is because Pannenberg intentionally approached the doctrine of the Trinity as the culminating and consummating aspect of his entire theological project.

The Path to Systematic Theology

Consider the trinitarian implications of what is probably the most controversial statement Pannenberg ever made; his early claim that "in a restricted but important sense, God does not yet exist."1 He would later admit that "this was sort of a daring statement," and he had to take pains to distinguish what he meant from either "the fad of death of God theologians" or process theologians.2 But he did not retract the statement, because for him it was neither accidental nor incidental; it was programmatic. His point, famously, was that God's existence is debatable during the course of world history, because by definition God must be the force which determines all things, and as of yet all things are not divinely determined in a way that reasonable observers can show to be unequivocal. "Thus the kingdom of God has not yet fully arrived and thus the being of God has not yet fully arrived."3 What may seem like a rhetorical

overstatement—that God's being has not arrived if its indubitability has not arrived—is in fact a claim that Pannenberg never backed down from. Nor was he merely by accident conflating an epistemological claim (about a truth we do not yet see) and an ontological claim (about an entity which does not yet exist). He was deeply committed to their convergence:

> Of course God could have not created a world. But if He created a world, and since He did, the divine identity of God, the existence of God, is inseparable from His kingdom in His creation. And therefore questions of the reality of God in our present world also include that only in the end will we know that God has been God all along the way, and we can confess to this only by anticipating the eschatological completion of the kingdom of God in this world. And that is to say, by faith.4

Pannenberg states here his characteristic teaching about the Kingdom of God's significance for the identity of God, without yet giving it any trinitarian specifications. But it is the drive to provide a concrete trinitarian elaboration of this teaching that gave his mature trinitarian theology (as magisterially stated in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*) its basic shape. Only at the end of world history, we might say, will we know that God has been the triune God all along.

How did Pannenberg develop his thoroughly history-centered trinitarianism? In a 1981 interview, he described how the doctrine of God was looming larger in his thoughts as he approached the writing of his *Systematic Theology*. "In recent years, the doctrine of God has taken more and more definitive shape in my thought," he said. "Hence today I feel much more confident to develop a doctrine of God and to treat the subjects of Christian dogmatics in that perspective. That doctrine will be more thoroughly trinitarian than any example I know of."5

By 1987 Pannenberg could describe some of the contours of this "more thoroughly trinitarian" doctrine of God. It would take the necessary next step in what he viewed as the modern revival of the doctrine, a revival that had not yet delivered on its promise. Pannenberg presupposed a particular narrative of the development of the doctrine. On his view, over the course of the Middle Ages and on into Protestant theology, the doctrine of the Trinity had become "something of an appendix" to the general "doctrine of the one God, his existence, essence, and attributes."6 Not until it was revivified by nineteenth century speculative theology would trinitarianism return to the center of the Christian doctrine of God. Karl Barth, partly under the influence of speculative theologians like Dorner, treated the doctrine of the Trinity not as an appendix to the doctrine of the one God, but as an implication of the Christian concept of revelation. That is, trinitarian considerations were not postponed until after the general doctrine of God but preceded and were already built into any statements about God. A further step was taken by Karl Rahner, whose thesis that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa" identified "God's pre-temporal eternity" with God's presence in salvation history. Rahner's *Grundaxiom* should have led him to "draw the consequence that the eternal self-identity of God could not be conceived independently of the salvation-historical workings of the Son and of the Spirit," but it did not. Rahner continued to presuppose the "independence of God's eternal self-identity," rather than moving it forward to the eschatological resolution. This kept him from giving a satisfactory answer to the question of "to what extent the Incarnation as an historical event has any significance for the identity of the eternal God himself."7 Beneath this question about God and the incarnation lurked a deeper one:

> It is hardly a coincidence that the "theology of the cross" became the second stumbling block for a revision of the doctrine of God in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity. The thesis of the identity of the salvation-economical and the immanent Trinity provokes not only the question, "What is the significance of the incarnation for the eternal Godhood of God?" but also the more radical question, "What is the significance of the crucifixion of the Incarnate One for the concept of God?"8

Theologians like Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel pressed exactly this line of inquiry. In a 1968 essay, Jüngel already declared that "God defined himself as God in the death of Jesus,"9 and by 1972, Moltmann would powerfully develop a highly influential staurocentric doctrine of God in *The Crucified God*.10 From Pannenberg's point of view, the recognition that God's own deity was at stake in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is exactly right: here above all, historical observers can witness an event that could seem to be taking place beyond the lordship of the all-determining divinity, and outside the righteous kingdom of God. But if "the Godhood of the God proclaimed by Jesus was placed in question by the crucifixion of Jesus," it is nevertheless true that the same divinity was "revealed and victoriously affirmed through the resurrection of Jesus."11 The divinity revealed and vindicated at the resurrection is not only that of Jesus, but of the Father he proclaimed; in fact, it is the divinity of God the Trinity.

At least it could be recognized to be so, if certain major pieces of theological equipment were put in place first. Putting that theological equipment in place is what Pannenberg's fully developed trinitarian theology was committed to doing. One of those pieces is a way of understanding the connection between Jesus and his Father in the resurrection as an event within the life of God. Pannenberg's complex Christology, set forth already in *Jesus—God and Man*, argued for "Jesus' resurrection as the ground of his unity with God."12 That is, it enabled Pannenberg to affirm the deity of Christ, and the incarnation, by working backward from the resurrection into the life of Jesus. Already in *Jesus—God and Man*, Pannenberg had argued that if the Father and Son together worked out divine revelation, then they must have done so on the basis of a unity that belonged to the very nature of God. He even traced some of the trinitarian implications of this interpersonal unity, asserting in a discussion of "the unity in the Trinity that 'if Father, Son and Spirit are distinct but coordinate mom ents in the accomplishment of God's revelation, then they are so in God's eternal essence as well.'"13 The longer Pannenberg worked with this theme, the more he subjected his proleptic Christology to a trinitarian thickening or elaboration. Naming both Son and Spirit as co-agents with the Father enabled him to take in a broader field of history:

> it is not just the sending of the Son and especially the resurrection of the Crucified One which are to be understood as constitutive for the divinity of the Father, but also the work of the Spirit who is the dynamic realization of the kingdom of God in the world, a kingdom without which God could not be God. Thus, for the Father, the actuality of his own Godhead depends upon the working of the Son and Spirit toward the realization of the Kingdom of God in the world.14

Where Pannenberg had previously only mentioned in passing that the God whose existence depends on his kingdom is the triune God, he grows increasingly consistent in his resolution to count to three: the Father raises the Son and sends the Spirit. Furthermore, the Son and Spirit are not just emissaries sent out

from a stable base of operations in the deity of the Father; their connection to him is so close that their economic activities are said to determine the deity of the Father.

What is implicit here is the final major piece of theological equipment Pannenberg needed to put in place in order to establish a sufficiently radical trinitarian doctrine of God. He needed to draw out the mutuality of the trinitarian relations, so that the very unity of God can be conceived of, from the beginning, as constituted relationally and reciprocally by the three. That is, if the deity of the Father depends on the resurrection of the Son, it must be the case that within the eternal Trinity itself the Father depends on the Son just as much as the Son depends on the Father. There are two unities to consider here. There is the inner-trinitarian unity which is grounded in reciprocal dependence relations, and there is the unity between the eternal being of God and the course of world history. The two are strongly linked for Pannenberg. The inner-trinitarian reciprocity correlates exactly with the reciprocity between the economic and immanent Trinity. Pannenberg describes his "growing awareness that the differentiation of the trinitarian persons and the reciprocity of their relationships are foundational for the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity."15 The more strongly the persons of the Trinity are differentiated and reciprocally related, the more the immanent and economic Trinity are unified.

There is a lot to hold together here, but that kind of scope is what we would expect to find in the fully trinitarian unfolding of Pannenberg's mature doctrine of God. The "more thoroughly trinitarian" doctrine of God he developed had to be one that would make "constructive use of antimetaphysical and atheistic criticisms of the concept of God" by incorporating within itself "criticism of the traditional doctrine of God in connection with the critique of metaphysics in modern thought."16 Pannenberg's incorporation of antimetaphysical criticisms can be seen in his modifications of the traditional doctrines of immutability, aseity, impassibility, and eternity; his incorporation of atheistic criticisms can be seen in his programmatic recognition that God's existence is debatable during the course of history. We are now in a position to see how Pannenberg develops these commitments in his full-scale, authoritative statement of the doctrine.

The Doctrine in Systematic Theology

Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity in chapter 5 of *Systematic Theology* is carefully structured in four major sections covering seventy-five pages. His overarching argument is that the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity must be the historical revelation in Christ, and particularly in Christ's message of the Father's kingdom. It is in the life of Jesus Christ that the eternal Son makes the differentiation between himself and the Father on one side, and himself and the Holy Spirit on the other. The theological project of trinitarian theology must start from these three revealed persons in history, and move from them to an understanding of the unity of the divine essence, rather than vice versa. These three persons are related to each other in a "richly structured nexus or relationship that binds together the Father, Son, and Spirit"17 in both time and eternity, and it is these relationships which mediate the Father's monarchy, a monarchy for which the Father is reciprocally dependent on Son and Spirit. It is a sprawling and bold argument; let us examine its four movements in more detail.

Pannenberg's concern for identifying the starting point of trinitarian theology is clear from §1, "The God of Jesus and the Beginnings of the Doctrine of the Trinity." Although he does not belabor the methodological or apologetic reasons for his choice, Pannenberg selects a foundation that is well

supported by a strong consensus of historical Jesus research, that the kingdom of God was the central theme of the message of Jesus. Pannenberg's trinitarian unfolding of kingdom theology begins just here, where he emphasizes that the kingdom that Jesus proclaims is the reign of the one he calls Father. Though some kind of Father relationship was evident in the relation of God to his chosen people in the Old Testament, it is only in the New Testament that "on the lips of Jesus, 'Father' became a proper name for God."18 That Jesus prayed to God as his Father emphasizes not only the very close link between Jesus and God, but simultaneously their clear differentiation: Jesus is the Son. Sonship, at least as a Christological title, does not quite establish the deity of Christ, but in Pannenberg's view the equally well-attested title "Lord" clearly does. The kingdom-focused communion between the Father and the Son is mediated through the Spirit, the mode of God's presence in Jesus (as he was formerly the mode of God's presence in the prophets and creation). As the basis of Jesus' sonship, this Spirit also becomes in Christian experience the Spirit of adoption; this is the logic which probably gave rise to the baptismal formula. We thus learn about the three persons of the Trinity only because the Son differentiates himself from the Father on one side and the Spirit on the other.

This one event, the message of Jesus about the kingdom, is the basis of our distinguishing between the three persons, which is to say that it is the basis of our talking about the inner life of God with its distinctions and relations. This is a departure from much traditional trinitarian theology, which attempted to distinguish the three persons on the basis of three different activities, spheres, or modes of working. Pannenberg is alert to the fact that once these distinctions of activity are posited, a threat to monotheism arises. An early solution to the problem was to radically subordinate the other persons to the monarchy of the Father, but this was unsatisfactory because if the Father is the source and origin of deity, it is impossible to distinguish the person of the Father from the Substance of the Godhead, and only the Father properly and originally possesses the divine substance. In Pannenberg's view, the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit remained a problem for theology yet to solve.

Pannenberg takes up this problem in the very complicated §2, "The Place of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Dogmatic Structure and the Problem of Finding a Basis for Trinitarian Statements." One reason for the difficulty of this section is the degree to which Pannenberg's constructive proposals depend on his construal of the history of doctrine. A hallmark of his entire *Systematic Theology* is that "historical and systematic reflection must continually permeate one another,"19 but not all of his sections of the work are as explicitly involved in reading the history of doctrine as is this section. According to Pannenberg, the standard approach in Western theology has been to start with the oneness of the divine essence and then attempt to infer or derive the threeness of the Trinity from that. This approach is fraught with dangers, and Pannenberg points out that in the twelfth century Gilbert de la Porrée declared any such attempt to be Sabellian.20 Anyone who attempts it has the task of proving that the doctrine of divine unity is only preliminary and actually incomplete without the doctrine of the Trinity; otherwise, the Trinity will appear to be a superfluous external addition to an otherwise complete doctrine of God. Augustine tried to solve this problem by establishing the absolutely undifferentiated simple unity of God, and then interpreting the statements of trinitarian doctrine on that basis. But Augustine did not derive the threeness from the unity; instead he settled for rendering the mysterious combination plausible through a vestigial trinitarian psychology. Several scholastics did attempt to derive the threeness from the oneness by way of a Christianized Neoplatonic analysis of the unfolding unity.

In Pannenberg's reading of history, the Protestant Orthodox theologians rejected the "Unity then Trinity" scheme, instead demonstrating the three persons from scriptural evidence.21 But they did not relate the threeness to the divine unity in any conceptual way: this led to the marginalizing of the doctrine of the Trinity. In the nineteenth century, Hegel (following Lessing) derived the three from the one in a breathtaking, speculative manner, but ended up subsuming the three in the one. Schleiermacher, or at least the mediating theologians who followed him, tended to follow the Protestant Scholastic tradition of developing the trinitarian persons from biblical evidence. This led them to ask whether confessing the revealed Trinity really required them to posit an essential, immanent Trinity, or whether such an abstract, speculative entity was something theology has no basis for speaking about. Barth made a great contribution to reviving the doctrine of the essential Trinity, but his masterful handling of the historical data was undercut by his actual derivation of the three persons from the formal concept of revelation as self-revelation: "God reveals himself as Lord."22 Pannenberg's survey of the one-three problematic supports the revisionist side of his project. On his view, any derivation of the three persons from the one essence leads to either modalism or subordinationism. An adequately trinitarian doctrine of God must not presuppose, but rather establish the unity of God revealed in Christ and the Spirit: "To find a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity we must begin with the way in which Father, Son, and Spirit come on the scene and relate to one another in the event of revelation."23 In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity must constitute a complete presentation of the unity of the three persons, and its basis must be in the concrete relations between them in the economy.

This is the task that Pannenberg undertakes in earnest in §3, "Distinction and Unity of the Divine Persons." The overarching argument of this section is that the new historical starting point will require a new conceptuality and will be accompanied by important changes in traditional terminology. Eternal processions and temporal missions are not exactly the same thing, but they can no longer be sharply distinguished from each other, since there is no way to approach the Son's begetting and sending separately. Both in fact, are equally constitutive and revelatory of the Son as we learn of him in scripture.24 Pannenberg sees no basis in scripture for deciding (with reference to the Son) that "begetting" is eternal, but "sending" is temporal, or (with reference to the Spirit) that "breathing" is eternal while "giving" is temporal. At this point, Pannenberg's argument is not just revisionist or novel, but risks a truly radical rejection of trinitarian theology as it has always been confessed. He is in fact quite firm in his judgment that the old ways of arguing must be set aside, and that a consistent modern trinitarianism truly requires the foundation he offers in his *Systematic Theology*. But he does suggest some roundabout ways that the traditional language can be retained. We may start with the clear, biblical fact of the Father sending the Son, but we could go on to affirm the Son's eternal generation by deducing it from "the idea of preexistence which the sending statements imply."25 In fact, he concedes that "traditional Christian theology might well have worked this matter out correctly under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ even though it cannot be adequately proved from individual biblical verses."26 Even here, he couches his concession in terms of his overall project of working his way from the historical revelation to a not-yet-completed summative synthesis: "The relations between the person of Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit might well prove to be not just historical or economic relations but relations which characterize the eternal divine essence."27 Pannenberg writes from a perspective in which eternal generation might turn out to be true, not just by the end of his system, but by the eschaton.

What constitutes "the concrete form of trinitarian relations" is not the traditional relations of origin, but "the reciprocal self-distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit."28 In Pannenberg's view, this reciprocal self-distinction is more immediate (because it is given in the Son's message), but many readers find it simultaneously more abstract (because it becomes thematic only upon a kind of transcendental reflection on the situation of revelation). Jesus' entire mission and message was to establish the lordship of God. To this end, he distinguished himself from the Father and subjected his own will to that of the Father. By thus giving place to the Father's claim to deity, Jesus honored the first commandment on behalf of all others: he absolutely let God be God. In doing this perfectly, Jesus is paradoxically at one with the Father: "He himself, in corresponding to the claim of the Father, is so at one with the Father that God in eternity is Father only in relation to him."29 The Son, manifest in the life of Jesus, is the eternal counterpart to the Father. Pannenberg especially underlines the mutuality in this relationship. He is championing what he considers "Athanasius' most important argument—that the Father would not be the Father without the Son and therefore that he was never without the Son."30 But for Pannenberg, the implications of Athanasius' point do not run back to eternal relations of origin (as Athanasius himself argued), but to mutually constitutive reciprocity in the relation between Jesus and the Father who sent him, a relation that is concrete, revealed, and historical. This mutuality is even more clear in the handing back and forth of the kingdom between Father and Son, an eschatological event to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15. Pannenberg takes care to complete the trinitarian thought by including the Holy Spirit: Especially in the resurrection of Jesus, the activities of Father and Son are routed through the Spirit. The Spirit can therefore be confessed as the condition and medium of the fellowship of Father and Son. The relations of the three persons, therefore, are marked by complete mutuality. A "richly structured nexus of relationship" exists between the three persons, which is something more than merely the relations of origin enshrined by traditional theology.31 On this basis, Pannenberg returns to the issue of relating the threeness and oneness of God. He has begun from the three, treating Father, Son, and Spirit as **living realizations of separate centers of action, not merely modes of one subject**. In addition to relations of origin, the nexus of relationship includes handings-over, receivings-back, obeyings, glorifyings, entrustings, and so on. None of these relations is incidental or merely economic; all are constitutive. Each person is a catalyst of many relations.

The final section of Pannenberg's chapter on the Trinity is §4, "The World as the History of God and the Unity of the Divine Essence." It is the shortest section (only nine pages), and in it Pannenberg undertakes to advance Barth's agenda of basing the doctrine of the Trinity on the revelation in Christ. The Father remains transcendent, acting in the world only through the Son and Spirit. Nevertheless, the Father is really involved in this way: the crucifixion of the Son calls into question the Father's own deity—"The progress of events decides concerning his deity as well as the deity of the Son."32 Still, Pannenberg insists, in these final pages, that this does not imply "a divine becoming in history. . . . as though the trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with its eschatological consummation."33 Suddenly the great question emerges again, which in his earliest theology took the form of the claim that God does not yet exist, and in his fully trinitarian synthesis takes the form of the claim that "the immanent Trinity itself, the deity of the trinitarian God, is at issue in the events of history."34

In our historical experience it might seem as if the deity of the God whom Jesus proclaimed is definitively demonstrated only with the eschatological consummation. It might also seem as if materially the deity of

God is inconceivable without the consummation of his kingdom, and that it is thus dependent upon the eschatological coming of the kingdom. But the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity. The dependence of his existence on the eschatological consummation of the kingdom changes nothing in this regard.35

As we saw earlier, Pannenberg never retracted his strong language in Theology and the Kingdom of God about a God who "does not yet exist." But in defending that language, he took recourse to the category of seeming: "it might seem as if." However things might seem in the course of history, and however much it might seem that God is not Lord until the eschatological consummation, Pannenberg assures us that the eschaton is "only the locus of the decision" about God's lordship. The eschaton is not so much a time in the future as the place (locus) where God determines his identity in relation to the world. The eternal deity of the trinitarian God somehow moves in history toward its final confirmation, and along with him moves the demonstrable truth of his revelation. Pre-modern theologies that conceived of God as immutable and distant from creation could only describe an eternal Trinity at a great remove from the events of world history, even the history of salvation. The eternal Trinity and the economic Trinity must be united, and this requires a concept of God as both transcendent and immanent, both eternally self-identical and historically debatable.

What to make of this "seeming," and how to relate it to the claim that "the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity," is the constant question in interpreting Pannenberg's historical trinitarianism. Is Pannenberg working with a notion of an eternal reality that manifests itself partially here and there over the course of the changing conditions of history? Can he have the "always" without sacrificing his commitment to a divine reality fully engaged in the process of history? Can history really count adequately for a God who is always Trinity from eternity to eternity, or does history only seem to count? In *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg works hard to clarify his position. The old conundrum with which he has grappled since his earliest work on revelation and the kingdom can now be resolved, he believes, precisely because of its trinitarian elaboration:

"Viewing the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as one presupposes the development of a concept of God which can grasp in one not only the transcendence of the divine being and his immanence in the world but also the eternal self-identity of God and the debatability of his truth in the process of history, along with the decision made concerning it by the consummation of history."36 His entire system rests on this historical trinitarian foundation, and as he brings the doctrine of God to a conclusion he promises that "under the sign of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity the rest of dogmatics in the doctrine of creation, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology will be part of the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Conversely, the doctrine of the Trinity is an anticipatory sum of the whole content of Christian dogmatics."37

In Christian theology, one of the purposes of the doctrine of the Trinity is to identify God. Pannenberg grasps this purpose and is fully alert to its implications for his radically historical trinitarianism. This leads him to introduce a peculiar concept about God's identity: he refers to "God's self-actualization."

To speak of God's self-actualization is to assert that "God actualizes himself in the world by his coming into it."38 There are distinct moments implied in the notion of self-actualization: "from the beginning of

its action the acting I would be identical in the full sense with the determination which is to be the result of the action."39

It is interesting that Pannenberg is not pressing into theological service a term that he finds in another field, such as psychology (though the term almost certainly has psychological connotations for English readers).

On Pannenberg's view, there could be no such thing as self-actualization by a human being, since humans are in a constant state of becoming and cannot be identical with themselves at the beginning and end of a process that constitutes them.

The notion of self-actualization is rather one that Pannenberg devised specifically to describe divine action in history. The triune God alone self-actualizes:

> The idea of self-actualization transcends our measure as finite beings. . . . Nevertheless, the relation of the immanent to the economic Trinity, of God's inner trinitarian life to his acts in salvation history inasmuch as these are not external to his deity but express his presence in the world, may very well be described as self-actualization. For here the subject and result are the same, as the expression demands.40

Few interpreters have found Pannenberg's solution entirely satisfactory, though many have expressed recognition of what he is attempting and admiration of the thoroughness with which he undertakes it. He employs his considerable learning toward the goal of maintaining two things simultaneously: a God who is always the triune God from eternity to eternity, and a God for whom history really matters. This is the scope of Pannenberg's **systematic-historical trinitarianism**. At the climax of the third volume of his theological system, Pannenberg describes "the march of the divine economy of salvation" as "an expression of the incursion of the eternal future of God to the salvation of creatures and thus a manifestation of the divine love." He goes on, in the final sentence: "The distinction and unity of the immanent and economic Trinity constitute the heartbeat of the divine love, and with a single such heartbeat this love encompasses the whole world of creatures."41

Conclusion

Pannenberg, as was asserted at the opening of this chapter, ranks among the great theologians. For several decades he enjoyed considerable theological fame. His star has dimmed somewhat in recent decades, at least in the sense that he is not as actively engaged by theologians: there are few places where courses on his thought are taught; he appears as an entry on fewer syllabi; dissertations on his work have slowed down; few projects in contemporary theology are identifiable as Pannenbergian in their inspiration, orientation, or substantive arguments.

In trinitarian theology, his work was closely identified with a set of issues and arguments that can be seen in retrospect as viewing the Trinity as the key to linking God's being to the course of world history.

Many major theologians were involved in this project in the late twentieth century, and among them Pannenberg stands out as undertaking the most ambitious project, symbolized by the career-capping, three-volume *Systematic Theology* which few in his generation produced. He also stands out at as being especially well versed in philosophy and historical theology. At a time when it was possible, even fashionable, for theologians to dismiss metaphysics, Pannenberg carefully articulated his reasons for embracing metaphysical thinking and arguing for revisions to some of the key categories that impinged on the doctrine of God (especially eternity, immutability, and aseity). Several of his historical judgments about the history of the doctrine of the Trinity were dubious at the time he made them and struck readers as funding his constructive agenda all too neatly. Many more of his judgments (including the way he deployed the East-West dichotomy, or his narrative of a fall of the doctrine of the Trinity into disuse) have been greatly undermined by subsequent scholarship. Nevertheless, Pannenberg's trinitarian theology dug so deep into the fundamental material of the doctrine of the Trinity, and reached out so widely to take in the full scope and implications of the doctrine, that it continues to be a deeply instructive treatment of the Trinity, profitable for all but the most antagonistic readers.

Pannenberg's trinitarian theology puts the eternal being of God and the reality of world history on the table at the same time.

Not many interpreters can completely follow him in the particular way he explains, arranges, and rearranges these two factors: what he does with them is distinctively and recognizably Pannenbergian. But the twofold subject matter, the triune God and history, is perennially important for all Christian theology, and Pannenberg excelled at expounding this classic Christian doctrine "under the sign of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity."

NOTES

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 56.
2. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Theta Phi Talkback Session with Wolfhart Pannenberg," The Asbury Theological Journal 46.2 (1991): 37. This is a published transcript of an open forum he held after his spring 1991 lectures at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY. It was the first time I heard Pannenberg lecture, and I recall it vividly.
3. Pannenberg, "Theta Phi Talkback," 38. I should be clear that Pannenberg had explained this already in the original 1969 publication; the point is that he had to keep on repeating and developing his explanation for decades.
4. Pannenberg, "Theta Phi Talkback," 38.
5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "God's Presence in History," The Christian Century, March 11, 1981, 263. Lest it appear that Pannenberg's early theology was not yet trinitarian, Iain Taylor rehearses the evidence from the earliest periods that Pannenberg was "always Trinitarian." Iain Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 3–5.
6. Pannenberg, "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," Dialog: A Journal of Theology 26.4 (1987): 250.
7. Pannenberg, "Problems," 251.
8. Pannneberg, "Problems," 251.
9. Pannenberg cites the essay's publication in Jüngel's Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Bemerkungen (München, Chr.: Kaiser Verlag, 1972), 119.
10. Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Pannenberg cites the 1973 German edition.

11. Pannenberg, “Problems,” 252.
12. Pannenberg, Jesus—God and Man (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 53–107.
13. Pannenberg, Jesus—God and Man, 180.
14. Pannenberg, “Problems,” 252. As Pannenberg points out here, he had argued this point in “The God of History: The Trinitarian God and the Truth of History,” Kerygma und Dogma 23 (1977), 76–92.
15. Pannenberg, “Problems,” 252. In a far-reaching essay, Bruce Marshall has noted that modern trinitarianism has tended to ignore the doctrine of divine unity altogether, in favor of considering “a unity of a different sort . . . the unity of ‘the economic Trinity’ and ‘the immanent Trinity’ as the main problem facing Trinitarian theology.” Bruce Marshall, “The Unity of the Triune God: Reviving an Ancient Question,” The Thomist 74 (2010): 1–32 (7–8). While many of Marshall’s criticisms of this trend do in fact apply to Pannenberg (whom Marshall does not mention), Pannenberg’s remarks show that he is actively concerned with correlating these two unities, and that the doctrine of the triune God’s unity is for him very much a vital question.
16. Pannenberg, “Problems,” 250.
17. Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1.320.
18. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.262.
19. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.xi.
20. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.282.
21. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.289.
22. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.295.
23. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.299.
24. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.305–1.306.
25. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.307.
26. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.307.
27. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.307
28. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.308. This language is the title of a subsection running to 319.
29. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.310.
30. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.273, 278–279.
31. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.320.
32. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.329.
33. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.331.
34. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.330.
35. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.331.
36. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.333.
37. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.355.
38. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.390.
39. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.390.
40. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 1.392.
41. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 3.646.

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End Chapter 5