PANNENBERG'S CONCEPTION OF THE TRINITARIAN RELATIONS

FROM THE FATHER?
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF WOLFHART PANNENBERG'S REVISION OF THE CLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF THE TRINITARIAN RELATIONS OF ORIGIN

by

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ABSTRACT

Wolfhart Pannenberg has established himself as a leading voice in the renewed discussion of trinitarian doctrine. Little has been written in English, however, to assess critically Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity. By examining a key point in Pannenberg's trinitarian theology, this thesis is intended to contribute toward meeting this need.

The aim of this thesis is to explain the reasons for, and to assess the coherence of Pannenberg's revision of the traditional understanding of the trinitarian relations of origin. Patristic trinitarian theology regarded God the Father as the fount of divinity, from whom the Son and Spirit receive their existence; the Father eternally begets the Son and breathes the Spirit. Pannenberg rejects this view, declaring it to be logically inconsistent and without biblical basis. He proposes in its place an alternative conception of relations of "reciprocal self-distinction". The source of Pannenberg's revision can be traced back to his views of reason, revelation, and the God-world relation.

An examination of the first four books of Augustine's The Trinity strongly suggests that the traditional view is not subject to the weaknesses Pannenberg indicates. As well, the comparison with Augustine reveals significant tensions within Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine. Specifically, I contend that (1) Pannenberg's assessment of Augustine's trinitarian doctrine is inaccurate; (2) Pannenberg, in his rejection of the biblical basis of the classical view, does not correctly identify the patristic understanding of the biblical basis of relations of origin; (3) Augustine's distinction between what divine revelation signifies concerning God-in-eternity, on the one side, and God's relation to creation, on the other, provides a possible solution to the logical conflict Pannenberg sees in the traditional view; and (4) unresolved tensions in Pannenberg's interpretation of the relation of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity undermine the coherence of his critique and revision of the classical model.

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Introduction

It is widely recognized that contemporary theology has seen a revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Munich theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg identifies himself as an enthusiastic participant in this renaissance, and with the publication of the first volume of his Systematic Theology he has established himself as one of the most significant contributors to the renewed discussion of trinitarian doctrine. There has been little written in English, however, devoted to a critical appraisal of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God. This thesis contributes toward meeting this need by delineating themes in Pannenberg's trinitarian theology, and critically assessing a particularly provocative aspect of his doctrine of God: his alternative account of the character of the inner-trinitarian relations.

According to Pannenberg, since the patristic era the divine ontology has been conceived chiefly in terms of relations of origin. Simply put, the concept of relations of origin regards the Father as the fount of divinity, from whom the Son and Spirit receive their existence. This understanding of the trinitarian nature of God received classic expression in terms of the divine processions: the Father eternally begets the Son and breathes the Spirit. Pannenberg contends, however, that the traditional model of

the divine relations is in need of serious modification.

In Pannenberg's estimation, the patristic conception fails on two counts. First, it does not have an adequate basis in the biblical witness. Second, it is not a logically consistent account of the divine ontology. Pannenberg proceeds to argue that these two weaknesses of the traditional account of the trinitarian relations inevitably lead to the problem of subordinationism. If the Son and Spirit receive their being from the Father, and the Father is not likewise dependent upon the Son and Spirit, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Son and Spirit are in some sense inferior in the order of divinity. As a corrective to this theological problem, Pannenberg proposes an alternative conception of relations of "reciprocal self-distinction".

The aim of this thesis is to explain the reasons for and to assess the coherence of Pannenberg's proposed revision. In light of my critical assessment of Pannenberg's argument, I conclude that, on the one side, the traditional conception of relations of origin is not necessarily subject to the deficiencies Pannenberg suggests, and, on the other side, Pannenberg's proposed alternative itself poses significant problems. Although Pannenberg's trinitarian theology represents an ambitious attempt to establish the centrality of trinitarian doctrine in contemporary theology, on this theme, at least, his project is not persuasive.

While my critique of Pannenberg begins to take shape alongside the presentation of Pannenberg's argument in the first three chapters of the thesis, the main thrust of my criticisms comes into view only in the fourth, final chapter. In that chapter's discussion the trinitarian theology of Augustine is introduced as a foil to reveal significant implications and potential weaknesses of Pannenberg's critique and revision of the classical account of the inner-trinitarian relations. Although Augustine and Pannenberg as theologians operate with quite different presuppositions, in quite different contexts, from different standpoints both thinkers grapple with the same basic question of whether the notion of relations of origin can be reconciled with the equality of the trinitarian persons. The presentation of Augustine's argument as a counterpoint to Pannenberg's revision brings the discussion of the thesis into conversation with the tradition Pannenberg criticizes, and, as well, provides a way to organize the various aspects of my critique of Pannenberg.

It is worth noting that Pannenberg regards his modified conception of the divine relations as a major aspect of his trinitarian doctrine of God. In his concise 1991 article, "The Christian Doctrine of God: The New Discussion on the Trinitarian Doctrine", he comments that

> [traditionally] the personal relations within the trinity were conceived of only in terms of relations of origin, the Son as generated by the Father, the Spirit as proceeding from the Father. The doctrine

> expressed the important idea that the identity of the persons was constituted by their relations, but in light of the biblical witnesses those relations have to be conceived of in a richer way and, most importantly, in terms of concrete mutuality. They must not be reduced to relations of origin.[1]

In the same article Pannenberg describes his proposed revision of traditional trinitarian doctrine.

> Son and Spirit share in the divine essence of the Father not just by being begotten and by proceeding from the Father, but by contributing to the kingdom of the Father that is entrusted to the Son and returned to the Father by himself through the Holy Spirit. It is in this concrete dynamics of perichoresis that the three persons share the same kingdom and the same essence which nevertheless remains to be primarily the kingdom and divine nature of the Father.[2]

As this quotation indicates, Pannenberg recognizes the partial basis for traditional trinitarian statements which ascribe priority to the Father. However, he supplements this understanding with reference to the mutuality of the relations in establishing the reign of God, and finds the latter point to be decisive for conceiving of the eternal relations in God. Interdependence, rather than origination, becomes for Pannenberg the chief conception of the trinitarian ontology.

In researching this thesis, I have found no critical appraisal of Pannenberg's daring move. These dismayed comments of an otherwise appreciative John O'Donnell are the

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[1] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion of the Trinitarian Doctrine," Trinity Seminary Review 13, no.2 (Fall 1991): 57.

[2] ibid., 59.

most substantial remarks I have found:

> [W]e know that Christian theology as far back as the Cappadocians defined the trinitarian persons in terms of their relations. But the Fathers of the Church did so in terms of relations of origin. Pannenberg rejects this teaching for the more contemporary doctrine of mutually dependent relations. But I would argue that although there is reciprocity among the persons of the Trinity, there is also a sense in which some relationships are unilateral. I do not see, for example, how one can lay aside the fact that in the Trinity everything proceeds from the Father, so that, for example, the Son receives his *hypostasis* from the Father and not vice versa. Neither the scriptures nor the tradition warrant an unrestricted mutuality of relationships in the Trinity. Once again, Pannenberg's tendency to link the eternal to the temporal, and his proclivity to make the immanent Trinity dependent on the economic, play him false.[3]

O'Donnell offers no critical assessment of Pannenberg's position, but his comments certainly indicate the tension that Pannenberg's challenge to traditional understanding creates. Moreover, O'Donnell rightly identifies Pannenberg's interpretation of the principle of the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity as the basis of his revision, and as the source of the clash with the classical model.

The first chapter of this thesis is divided into two sections. The first section outlines the main premises which shape Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God. Pannenberg's understanding of the role of reason and revelation receive particular attention. As well, in order to identify the background ideas at work in Pannenberg's theology, I call attention to two principles of particular importance: his

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[3] John O'Donnell, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of God". Gregorianum 72, no.1 (1991): 96.

concept of the priority of the future, or "eschatological ontology", and his understanding of the relationship between God's being and God's rule over creation. In this phase of the discussion I introduce Pannenberg's foundational trinitarian thesis, that

> trinitarian doctrine simply states explicitly what is implicit already in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and basically in Jesus' historical relationship to the Father who he proclaimed to be the one God.[4]

The second section of the chapter examines Pannenberg's critical assessment of historical trinitarian theology. This examination serves three main purposes. First, it clarifies Pannenberg's procedure in the task of trinitarian theology. In line with his premises regarding reason and revelation, Pannenberg tests historic accounts of trinitarian dogma for their internal coherence and correspondence to biblical revelation. Secondly, the historical overview uncovers the roots of Pannenberg's disagreement with the classical notion of trinitarian relations of origin. Thirdly, Pannenberg's historical perspective provides a context for the discussion, undertaken in the second chapter of the thesis, of his own proposed trinitarian doctrine of God.

In the second chapter of the thesis, two concerns are chiefly in view. First, I trace the development of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine from his foundational thesis to his conception of the inner-trinitarian relations.

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[4] Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion of the Trinitarian Doctrine", 54.

That portion of the discussion lays a foundation for a careful comparison (in the third chapter) of the content of Pannenberg's conception of the divine relations and the traditional view of these relations as relations of origin. The second concern is to consider the significance of Pannenberg's account of the trinitarian relations for his concept of divine transcendence. Problems with clarity and coherence in Pannenberg's view of the God-world relation prove to be of significance in the comparison of Pannenberg and Augustine.

The third chapter examines more closely Pannenberg's proposed revision. The discussion unfolds in three stages. First, I examine Pannenberg's repudiation of the biblical basis for the notion of relations of origin. Then follows, secondly, an attempt to elucidate Pannenberg's alternative concept of trinitarian relations of reciprocal self-distinction. In carrying out this task, establishing a clear perspective on Pannenberg's alternative to the traditional concept of the ontology of God is made difficult by his extremely compressed style of writing as well as the vagueness and complexity of his argumentation. The goal of that portion of my discussion is to define with some degree of precision the specific content of Pannenberg's view of the trinitarian relations vis-a-vis the classical model. In the third part of the chapter I make a preliminary start on the critical discussion (to be expanded in the fourth

chapter), by pursuing Roger Olson's criticism that Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine fails to escape the charge of subordinationism.

In the fourth and final chapter, I critically assess Pannenberg's revised account of the trinitarian relations by testing his treatment of the topic against Augustine's argument in the first four books of The Trinity.[5] The first part of the chapter is devoted to a careful presentation of Augustine's complex response to the problem, arising out of Nicene theology, of subordinationism. While not every aspect of Augustine's argument is relevant to the present topic, four areas of critical significance arise from a comparison with Pannenberg's trinitarian project. These are: (1) the accuracy of Pannenberg's treatment of patristic theology in his historical analysis; (2) the accuracy of Pannenberg's refutation of the biblical basis for relations of origin; (3) the coherence of Pannenberg's procedure for assessing the merit of the concept of relations of origin, in light of Augustine's contrasting approach; and (4) the coherence of Pannenberg's interpretation of the principle of the identity of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity.

While supplementary materials from Pannenberg's writings are employed where helpful, the ensuing discussion draws primarily on the English translation of the first

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[5] Augustine, The Trinity, translated by Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991).

volume of Pannenberg's three volume Systematic Theology.[6] My analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine centres on the fifth chapter of the Systematic Theology, "The Trinitarian God".[7] This excludes from detailed consideration Pannenberg's account of the unity of God, a topic he includes within his discussion of the essence and attributes of God in the sixth chapter. As well, it should be noted that Pannenberg claims that the whole of his "dogmatics in the doctrine of creation, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology [is] part of the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity."[8] Hence a full scale assessment of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine would require an examination of his theology in its entirety. However, in the present context, the fifth chapter of the systematics provides a sufficient basis for an analysis of the topic at hand, Pannenberg's revised conception of the trinitarian relations.

Three secondary texts will be seen to be of particular value for this thesis. Reason for Hope,[9] by Stanley Grenz, concisely summarizes the whole of Pannenberg's three volume

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[6] Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, v.1, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991). Originally published as Systematische Theologie, band 1 (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[7] ibid., 259-336.

[8] ibid., 335.

[9] Stanley Grenz, Reason for Hope (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Systematics. At points Grenz notes links between Pannenberg's trinitarian theology and underlying philosophical premises that are not clearly drawn out in the Systematic Theology. Roger Olson's 1990 article "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity",[10] the most extensive treatment of the topic available in English, offers helpful insights that provide an entry point for detailed critical discussion. The Tübingen theologian Walter Kasper's The God of Jesus Christ,[11] is a contemporary treatment of trinitarian doctrine more in line with the classical tradition, and as such offers a helpful comparison with Pannenberg's relatively innovative approach.

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[10] Roger Olson, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity", Scottish Journal of Theology 43, no.2 (1990): 175-206.

[11] Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (London: SCM Press, 1983).

Chapter 1

Pannenberg's Trinitarian Doctrine of God

In this chapter I will (I) identify the main premises which shape Pannenberg's theological argumentation in general and his trinitarian doctrine in particular, and (II) illustrate how Pannenberg tests historic trinitarian conceptions against his basic premises. In the first section, my primary concern is with the relationship of reason and revelation in Pannenberg's thought. An examination of Pannenberg's views of reason and revelation also provides an occasion for comment on two significant themes: his famous and puzzling concept of "eschatological ontology", and his understanding of the relationship between the being of God and the reign of God over creation. In the discussion of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in the chapters that follow, his thinking in these areas will be seen to bear directly on his trinitarian doctrine. The chapter's second section examines Pannenberg's application of his premises regarding reason and revelation to his critical assessment of historical trinitarian theology. A rational analysis of the tradition of trinitarian theology is an integral aspect of Pannenberg's own efforts to articulate a systematic trinitarian doctrine of God, and an account of his treatment of the tradition largely explains the direction his own trinitarian thought takes.

In the context of this thesis it is not possible to

treat in detail the foundational ideas of Pannenberg's theological project. Nor is it possible at every point to assess the accuracy of Pannenberg's interpretation of the historical figures he critiques. The aim of the ensuing discussion is simply to set the stage for the second chapter's delineation of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God, as well as for critical reflection in the third and fourth subsequent chapters on Pannenberg's revision of the classical concept of trinitarian relations of origin.

I. Foundational Premises of Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology

The following assertion provides a helpful point of departure for examining the background ideas which inform Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God. He states

> the doctrine of the Trinity is a full and self-consistent presentation of the unity of the God who reveals himself in Christ. It is then the result of a systematic understanding and construction of something which is only indicated in the NT witness but implicitly present materially in the faith of primitive Christianity.[1]

By seeking to articulate a "full and self-consistent" presentation which results in a "systematic" construct, Pannenberg gives an indication of the central role played by critical reason in his theological method. And by declaring the topic to be "the God who reveals himself in Christ", as understood through the "[New Testament] witness" and the

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[1] Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 292.

"faith of primitive Christianity", Pannenberg flags the central importance of revelation. His understanding of the respective roles of and relationship between reason and revelation in the task of theology determines the course he pursues throughout his Systematic Theology. I will outline, in turn, (1) his understanding of the role of critical reason in theology and (2) his concept of revelation.

1. Theology, Truth and Critical Reason

In the wake of the Enlightenment, Pannenberg observes, the application of critical reason to topics of Christian dogma has created a crisis for theology. The authority of scripture and tradition have been undermined, displaced by the authority of reason. With this intellectual shift, Christianity has lost its basis for its claim to be objectively and universally true. Broadly viewed, Pannenberg's theological efforts are devoted to articulating Christian dogmatic themes and demonstrating their validity in a way that meets the critical standards bequeathed by the Enlightenment.

For the most part, Pannenberg laments theology's inadequate response to intellectual challenges posed to Christianity by Enlightenment philosophy. He observes that the loss of consensus on the objective truth of Christian doctrine has prompted theologians to locate religious certainty in the believing subject. He asks, however,

> [h]ow can theology make the primacy of God and his revelation in Jesus Christ intelligible, and validate

> its truth claim, in an age when all talk of God is reduced to subjectivity...?[2]

Specifically, Pannenberg notes that Schleiermacher viewed dogmatics "as an expression of the religious subjectivity of the theologian".[3] Karl Barth rejected Schleiermacher's view, and attempted to reestablish in theology the objectivity of God, as encountered in faith in the self-authenticating Word of God. Most famous in Barth's project is his rejection of philosophical theology as a basis for the truth of Christian claims. But, Pannenberg contends, Barth's approach ultimately fails to establish the objectivity of God because for Barth the gap between the believing subject and the object of faith is spanned by the subject's act of faith, which is not open to any outside verification. He objects, "[t]his surely means... that in fact Barth was again basing dogmatics on faith as risk if not on faith as experience."[4] The critical issue for Pannenberg is that post-Enlightenment theology requires a conception of the relationship between faith, reason and truth that does justice to the central place of critical reason in modern thought. To posit a personal act of faith as the path to accepting Christian truth claims is, in Pannenberg's view, an inadmissible short cut.

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[2] ibid., 128.

[3] ibid., 41.

[4] ibid., 44.

Pannenberg's assessment of this problem for theology is laid out in an early essay "Insight and Faith".[5] He argues that when the truth claim of Christian doctrine

> does not convince my power of judgement, then its acknowledgement becomes just a matter of decision, and thereby we return again to the ruinous consequence that faith grounds itself, and so distorts that which is essential to it, viz., its dependence upon a truth outside itself. If the moment of decision becomes foundational for the structure of faith, then the bond with truth "outside myself" [*extra me*], is irretrievably lost.[6]

For Pannenberg, the truth of Christianity is not to be grounded in a decisive act of faith. Instead, he contends that the response of faith is to be grounded in an intellectually compelling account of the content of Christianity. In a reversal of the classical formula that theology is "faith seeking understanding", Pannenberg contends that theology in the modern period must persuade a critically informed understanding of the reasonableness of faith. Faith, for Pannenberg, is trust in God that is rationally grounded in reliable historical knowledge.

Avery Dulles notes a shift over time in Pannenberg's thought on this topic. In his early thought, Dulles observes, Pannenberg sharply distinguished between the *act of faith* as "a trusting surrender of one's existence to the God who has been manifested in Jesus Christ", and *assent to*

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[5] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Insight and Faith" in Basic Questions in Theology, v.2, translated by G.H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

[6] ibid., 34.

the truth of Christianity, which "must be grounded in knowledge", and which rests "on reasons which hold up under examination".[7] Dulles notes, however, that more recently "Pannenberg places greater emphasis on the dialectical interplay between faith and knowledge."[8] This modification has the effect that "Pannenberg now identifies faith not only with trust but also with intellectual assent."[9] Concretely, Pannenberg's revision in this regard can be seen in his theology of the resurrection. In his early writings he contended (controversially) that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a fact of history, ascertainable through historical investigation. Now, Dulles comments, "[m]ore than previously, [Pannenberg] concedes that the resurrection will not be affirmed as a fact except by those who are drawn in hope by the life it promises."[10] Nonetheless, in spite of this modification, the closer relationship Pannenberg sees between faith and rational knowledge does not compromise for him the priority of reason in the task of theology. Theology for Pannenberg is required to give a coherent and intellectually persuasive account of the contents of Christian doctrine.

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[7] Avery Dulles, The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 163.

[8] ibid., 164.

[9] ibid., 164.

[10] ibid., 164.

How, then, does such persuasion occur? Pannenberg argues that "the convincingness of the Christian message can stem only from its contents."[11] Christian doctrine, in his view, offers an intellectually compelling account of reality, in that Christian dogmatic themes illumine all other fields of human knowledge. This view is at the root of Pannenberg's understanding of the purpose of theology: it is the task of systematic theology to establish the truth of dogmatics.

> Systematic theology ascertains the truth of Christian doctrine by investigation and presentation of its coherence as regards both the interrelation of the parts and the relation to other knowledge.[12]

The standard of "coherence as regards... the interrelation of the parts" becomes manifest in Pannenberg's relentless demand for logical consistency in trinitarian (and indeed all dogmatic) statements. The coherence of theological statements as regards "the relation to other knowledge" means for Pannenberg that the enterprise of theology is not an 'in house' undertaking, restricted to the community of faith, but rather is a "public" endeavour. Stanley Grenz comments on this intriguing feature of Pannenberg's theology:

> Faith is not a way of knowing in addition to reason... but is grounded on public, historical knowledge. For this reason, [Pannenberg] declares, theology cannot be a private, sheltered sphere of life. Instead,

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[11] Pannenberg, "Insight and Faith", 35.

[12] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 22.

> theological affirmations must be subjected to the rigour of critical scrutiny concerning the historical reality on which they are based. Theology, in other words, must be evaluated on the basis of critical canons, just as the other sciences.[13]

Critical scrutiny of theological statements is not, of course, unique to Pannenberg. Indeed, critical assessment of theological statements is basic to the task of theology. What is distinctive about his approach is the interdisciplinary character of the critical process. Christian theology, in Pannenberg's view, takes its place among other academic disciplines, contributing to and benefiting from critical conversation. An interesting implication of Pannenberg's perspective in this regard has to do with the task of theological apologetics. For Pannenberg, a case for the truthfulness of theological claims is not undertaken as a preface to systematic theology. Rather, arguments for the Christian truth claims are woven into the fabric of a dogmatic presentation of Christian themes. The significance of this goal for trinitarian doctrine is that the cogency of Pannenberg's project must be defensible by the standards of the critical canons of modern scholarship.

Other ideas factor into Pannenberg's application of critical reason. Notably, the central, philosophical significance he ascribes to eschatology permeates all facets of his argumentation, from his concept of truth to his

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[13] Grenz, Reason for Hope, 9.

proposed trinitarian ontology. This hallmark feature of Pannenberg's theology, sometimes termed as "eschatological ontology",[14] is difficult to grasp and defies detailed assessment in the brief scope of this thesis. This theme requires at least brief treatment in this discussion, however, as it bears directly on the present question of Pannenberg's concepts of reason and revelation. As well, as the second chapter will show, aspects of the question of eschatology are integral to the construction of Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity.

The basic ideas behind Pannenberg's eschatological ontology are laid out in an early work, Theology and the Kingdom of God.[15] The point of departure for Pannenberg's views is the shift he perceives in New Testament theology with regard to the concept of the kingdom of God. Whereas nineteenth century theology interpreted the biblical theme of God's kingdom primarily in ethical terms, recent scholarship has recovered the eschatological significance of this core biblical theme. Pannenberg asserts that the kingdom of God is to be "understood as the eschatological future brought about by God himself."[16] However, the full

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[14] Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 198.

[15] Wolfhart Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God, edited by Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969).

[16] ibid., 53.

philosophical and theological significance of this biblical theme has not, in Pannenberg's estimation, been properly realized.

If, biblically understood, God's reign in the future will be complete, whereas presently the state of the world suggests that God's reign is realized only in a fragmentary way, the consummation of creation is of decisive significance for the whole history of creation. Pannenberg attempts to expand this eschatological vision into a philosophical system, and so reconceive the God-world relation. He asserts that the "priority of the eschatological future which determines our present demands a reversal...in our ontological conceptions."[17] Taken then to its logical conclusion, the biblical idea of God's kingdom as the present in-breaking of God's eschatological rule leads theology to posit the "ontological priority of the future".[18]

The reversal Pannenberg calls for may be explained by considering his concepts of transcendence and immanence. Early Christian thought appropriated categories from hellenistic philosophy to conceive of the transcendence of God. God is, in this view, the highest spiritual being in the order of reality. The essence of a thing participates in an 'upper' realm of unchanging eternal substance, whereas a

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[17] ibid., 54.

[18] ibid., 63.

thing's existence is a reality 'below' in the world. In this perspective, God is traditionally conceived as the initiator of creation from beyond some primordial past. In Pannenberg's reversal God is "the power of the future" who releases past and present events into existence from the future.[19] Creation's source is its future.

Pannenberg argues that the availability of hellenistic categories to express the reality of God cut theology off from developing more fully a concept of God that takes seriously the eschatological perspective of the New Testament. Since the modern world does not share the classical perspective on the order of being, the category of the future suggests itself to Christian theology as a possible way to conceive of the relation of existence and essence, not in spatial terms, but in temporal categories. God transcends he world as the "power of the ultimate future".[20] And since, from the standpoint of the world, the divine transcendence is a future reality, divine immanence in the world has the character of prolepsis. God's acts of power in history are irruptions into the present of the world's future, in which the reign of God is fully realized. Most significantly, the life and message and resurrection of Jesus, and the presence of the Spirit, anticipate the future reign of God.

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[19] ibid., 62.

[20] ibid., 62.

An important related principle that follows from the idea of the priority of the future is Pannenberg's dictum that "[t]he deity of God is his rule".[21] He contends that "God's being and existence cannot be conceived apart from his rule."[22] This idea is, according Pannenberg, fundamental in the history of religions. The decisive demonstration of the reality of a deity is that deity's power to act in history. "To put it in the language of the philosophy of religion" Pannenberg writes, "the being of the gods is in their power."[23] Pannenberg sees this principle at work in Israel's contentious claim that Yahweh was the one true deity. More significantly, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in this perspective may be seen as the definitive declaration of God's power over creation. Pannenberg qualifies his principle that "God's deity equals his rule" by stating that "this does not mean that God could not be God apart from the existence of finite beings, for God certainly can do without anything or anyone else. It does mean that, if there are finite beings, then to have power over them is intrinsic to God's nature."[24] However, until the complete realization of God's power in his reign, the existence of God remains, from a human standpoint, a matter

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[21] ibid., 54.

[22] ibid., 55.

[23] ibid., 55.

[24] ibid., 55.

of uncertainty.

Pannenberg's eschatological ontology is an extremely complex subject. It should be noted that even quite sympathetic interpreters confess puzzlement on this point. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, for example, ask

> [c]an the future, which is in some sense truly open, have an effect on the present? Is retroactive causality conceivable? Does the temporal category of futurity actually solve the problems of divine transcendence that plagued the traditional imagery?[25]

And this difficulty in Pannenberg's thought bears on the present discussion. In his 1990 essay Olson comments that

> [t]he most difficult problem with Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity is the same one which has perplexed and delighted his interpreters for over two decades: the futurity principle.[26]

The problem of the ambiguity of this aspect of Pannenberg's thought will resurface in the second chapter's discussion of the Trinity and the God-world relation in Pannenberg's theology. There I will question whether the lack of clarity on this issue threatens the coherence of his concept of transcendence. More to the point, this aspect of Pannenberg's thought is of determinative significance for the procedure he follows in his account of the inner-trinitarian relations. For the present, it is sufficient to consider how Pannenberg's eschatological perspective shapes his concepts of reason and revelation in theology.

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[25] Grenz and Olson, Twentieth Century Theology, 199.

[26] Olson, "Pannenberg's Trinity", 203.

To return then to the question of the role of critical reason in theology, Pannenberg claims that the content and truth of dogma is an 'eschatological concept'. He explains that

> [o]nly God's final revelation at the end of history will bring with it final knowledge of the content and truth of the act of God in Jesus of Nazareth. God alone has the competence to speak the final word about God's work in history.[27]

Against the horizon of the eschaton, the question for Pannenberg is how theology might speak competently about God in the present. Pannenberg's answer is that a religious truth claim in propositional form may be regarded as an hypothesis.[28] Such assertions are subject to critical scrutiny for testing for validity, not merely in the community of faith but in the broader intellectual community. Although the truth of Christian claims remains debatable prior to God's eschatological self-disclosure, the application of critical reason to the data of God's revelation in history allows theology to come to the closest possible approximation of the truth that remains to be fully manifest. Critical reflection on the proleptic events of God's revelation allows theology to arrive at provisional statements concerning the content of Christian dogma.

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[27] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 16.

[28] ibid., 58.

2. Revelation

As the quotation at the beginning of the chapter indicates, Pannenberg's concept of revelation is at the heart of his understanding of theology's task. Indeed, although he ultimately pursues a very different course than his predecessor, Pannenberg agrees with Barth that "knowledge of God is possible only if God gives himself to be known."[29] Pannenberg identifies the importance of revelation as a point of departure for rational reflection and dogmatic construction when he writes

> the theological testing and verification of the truth claims of Christian revelation will take place in the form of systematic reconstruction of Christian doctrine, beginning with the understanding of God which is in the event of his revelation to which the scriptures bear witness and which was the express theme in the theological discussions that led to the formation of the doctrine of the Trinity.[30]

Several aspects of Pannenberg's concept of revelation are implicit in this quotation. First, it is notable that scripture "bears witness" to "the event of [God's] revelation". As with much modern theology, Pannenberg does not regard the biblical witness itself as revelation (as inspired text), but as recorded testimony to God's acts in history. Similarly, the "theological discussions that led to the formation of the doctrine of the Trinity" are not

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[29] ibid., 241.

[30] ibid., 257.

assigned any special authority as revelation. Rather, critical scrutiny of both the biblical testimony and the theological tradition yields access to the character and significance of God's actions in history.

In line with his concept of reason, perhaps the most significant aspect of Pannenberg's concept of revelation is that it accords with his view of theology as a "public" enterprise. An interpretation of the data of revelation requires an acceptance of neither the divine inspiration of scripture nor the authority of the magisterium. Rather, the content of revelation is available to view through historical-critical investigation. Put another way, debate regarding the content of God's revelation does not require belief in the truth of its content. Rather, investigation of the revelation's content is the process by which the truth of its content may be established. Such a conception of revelation, Pannenberg argues, accords with the understanding of revelation implicit in the biblical materials themselves. Paradigmatically, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a public event, an act of God in history which reveals God's sovereignty over creation. The apostolic witness to the event of Jesus rising from the dead attests to the revelatory act, so that the written accounts of the historical event are rooted in that event.

The eschatological perspective that shapes Pannenberg's understanding of truth similarly permeates his view of

revelation. The fullness of God's self-disclosure, in his view, awaits the end of history, when the sole lordship of God will be demonstrated.[31] Events of revelation in history are proleptic moments of the realization of God's reality. Supremely, Jesus' life and proclamation and the Spirit as present in the church are anticipatory manifestations of the dawning future of God.[32] Pannenberg explains his concept with this comparison: as the raising of Jesus from the dead retrospectively vindicated the claims of Jesus, which his crucifixion had cast into doubt, so also the eschatological self-disclosure of God will validate the truth of Christian claims, which remain debatable prior to that future moment.

The above-outlined concept of revelation, united with his understanding of the role of critical reason in theology, give Pannenberg's theological methodology its distinctive character. Taken together, Pannenberg's concept of revelation as history and his view that the content of Christian dogma is known through rational analysis means that historical science is the means by which dogmatic themes are to be understood. Pannenberg declares that

> Christian doctrine is first to last a historical construct. Its content rests on the historical revelation of God in the historical figure of Jesus Christ and on the precise evaluation, by historical interpretation alone, of the testimony that early

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[31] ibid., 246.

[32] ibid., 247.

Christian proclamation gives to this figure.[33]

With specific regard to trinitarian theology, what is the significance of Pannenberg's premises regarding reason and revelation? First, in light of the preceding discussion, it is no surprise that the point of departure for any discussion of God is, for Pannenberg, the historical Jesus. Historical-critical methods are shared both by theology and other academic disciplines, and so suit Pannenberg's view of theology as a public task. As well, the attention to be given to the historical person of Jesus accords with Pannenberg's view of revelation as mediated through the events of history. The result of these premises is Pannenberg's fundamental trinitarian thesis:

> trinitarian doctrine simply states explicitly what is implicit already in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and basically in Jesus' historical relationship to the Father who he proclaimed to be the one God.[34]

Secondly, the premises regarding reason and revelation provide the critical standard by which Pannenberg examines the historical tradition of trinitarian thought. Rational coherence requires dogmatic trinitarian statements to be logically consistent. The historical character of God's revelation requires trinitarian statements to be tested against what historical science concludes as to the content of the historical figure of Jesus.

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[33] ibid., x.

[34] Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The new Discussion of the Trinitarian Doctrine", 54.

Thirdly, with regard to historical trinitarian theology, the twofold standard of reason and revelation gives rise to an array of questions, to which trinitarian statements must respond. In its most basic form, the doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the one God exists as three equal persons in unity. Within this affirmation are implicit questions which can be brought to bear against trinitarian conceptions. How are the unity and the plurality related? Does a given trinitarian conception emphasize either unity or plurality at the expense of the other? Does a given trinitarian conception adequately maintain the equality of the divine persons? Do given trinitarian statements accurately explicate themes implicit in the biblical witness? The perennial problems of trinitarian thought issue from trinitarian conceptions which inadequately answer this range of questions. Excessive emphasis on the unity of God results in modalism; an inadequate account of the unity of the three persons results in the charge of tri-theism; an imbalanced emphasis on the priority of the Father results in subordinationism. In his trinitarian theology, Pannenberg both tests historic trinitarian models for their adequacy in addressing these questions, and, over against his judgement of the failure of historical proposals, seeks to articulate his own theological response.

A fourth noteworthy aspect of Pannenberg's approach to

trinitarian doctrine is the apparent implication that God's trinitarian character can be understood through reason, by reflection on the data of revelation in history, apart from personal faith. I have noted Pannenberg's reversal of the classical understanding of theology as 'faith seeking understanding', in favour of his project to establish the truth of Christian claims through his application of critical reason. The coherence of Christian dogmatic themes is to be measured by their appeal to critical judgement. The most famous implication of this feature of Pannenberg's theology is his controversial claim regarding the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Pannenberg contends that the event of Jesus resurrection is the logical conclusion that makes best sense of the available historical data on primitive Christianity.[35] The implications of the application of critical reason in Pannenberg's theology for his trinitarian doctrine perhaps promise to be similarly controversial. If systematic theology as a public enterprise has as its task demonstration of the truth of Christian dogmatic themes, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that Pannenberg's Trinity may be known through reason.

This view marks a dramatic departure from the classical

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[35] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology v.2, 360-363. Grenz comments that the "central questions dividing Pannenberg and his critics concern the historicity of this event [the resurrection] and its significance for humanity." Reason for Hope, 142.

tradition. Aquinas, for example, argues that "[i]t is impossible to come to knowledge of the Trinity of divine persons through natural reason."[36] To note this difference in approach is not to attempt to repudiate Pannenberg's procedure, but simply to draw attention to the fact that Pannenberg's outlook, on a fundamental level, differs significantly from that of traditional theology. With regard to trinitarian doctrine specifically, we might contrast Pannenberg's pursuit of a rationally defensible trinitarian doctrine with comments of Tübingen theologian Walter Kasper, which fall more in line with the classical tradition. He writes

> [t]here are three points in particular that remain incomprehensible and impenetrable to our minds: 1. the absolute unity of the persons despite the distinction of the persons; 2. the absolute equality of the persons despite the dependence of the second on the first and of the third on the first and second; 3. the eternity of God as Father, Son and Spirit despite the fact that they are established as such by the activities of generation and spiration.[37]

Kasper's view that these points of trinitarian doctrine lie beyond rational comprehension offers an interesting comparison with Pannenberg's unwaveringly rationalistic approach. I suspect that Pannenberg might regard the category of 'mystery' as a safe haven for theology to

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[36] Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica v.6, edited by Thomas Gilby, translated by Ceslaus Velecky (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), Prima Pars, 32.3.

[37] Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, translated by Matthew J' O'Connell (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), 268-9.

retreat to when the historical-critical going gets tough. In contrast to Kasper's understanding, Pannenberg's application of critical reason in coordination with his conception of revelation as history leads him to the odd position of having access to the inner life of God through the historical-critical method. In reply, one might suggest that the nature of the topic at hand, God, requires that a category such as mystery be employed.

II. Pannenberg's Critique of Historical Trinitarian Conceptions

Measured against Pannenberg's twofold standard of reason and revelation, how have historic attempts to articulate trinitarian doctrine fared? What improvements are needed? Pannenberg analyzes historical trinitarian conceptions for their internal coherence and correspondence with God's revelation in history.

In the forward to the Systematic Theology Pannenberg confesses that he had at one time intended that his systematics would "concentrate solely on the essential coherence of the dogmatic themes, leaving aside the confusing profusion of historical questions..."[38] However, his view of the historical character of revelation argued against this approach. He concluded that

[r]eflection upon the historical place of dogmatic

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[38] ibid., x.

> concepts and the related identifying and relative weighing of the essential themes of Christian doctrine are indispensable to an impartial judgement of their fitness and scope in expressing the universal significance of the history of and person of Jesus Christ.[39]

Pannenberg continues, "[a]s regards the truth claims raised in the investigation and presentation of Christian doctrine, historical and systematic reflection must continually permeate one another."[40] Concretely, Pannenberg's view of the relation of historical theology and systematic construction requires that a survey of key points in the history of Christian thought on a given theme be integrated into his theological proposals. This procedure entails that Pannenberg's dogmatic statements emerge as a critical appropriation of themes presented in succinct historical-theological overviews. Grenz comments that "[t]his structure provides a helpful clue to Pannenberg's understanding of truth: truth emerges from the flow of historical debate."[41] Pannenberg's trinitarian theology typifies this approach.

In an extremely compressed discussion, Pannenberg surveys and critically sifts various of the historical attempts to articulate a self-consistent trinitarian doctrine of God. Throughout, as will be seen, he is constantly on the watch for inconsistencies in trinitarian

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[39] ibid., xi.

[40] ibid., xi.

[41] Grenz, Reason for Hope, 13.

statements and for trinitarian speculations that have no adequate basis in revelation. Both types of error, according to Pannenberg, need to be purged from a contemporary systematic presentation of Christian doctrine. In the process of his historical analysis Pannenberg also retrieves from the tradition elements which suit his critical approach and integrates them into his theological project.

1. Trinitarian Doctrine in the Patristic Era

In the first phase of his discussion of historical trinitarian theology, Pannenberg assesses the treatment of proto-trinitarian biblical themes in early patristic theology. The most notable, and in his view problematic, feature of trinitarian discussion leading to the Nicene period is the rise to prominence of the notion of relations of origin as the chief conception of the intra-divine relations. In his assessment of patristic trinitarian developments Pannenberg finds this paramount idea, that the Son and Spirit eternally proceed from the Father, to be inherently subordinationist.

In Pannenberg's view, the early fathers properly regarded God's revelation in Jesus as the necessary point of departure for trinitarian doctrine. For the early fathers, he observes, "the story of Jesus as the Son in self-distinction from the Father on the one side and the Spirit on the other was still the starting point for an

establishment of trinitarian distinctions..."[42] Early trinitarian conceptions were not, therefore, based upon philosophical ideas or notions of different types of activity of the three persons, but on the biblical narrative's depiction of three divine personalities, each distinct from, yet related to the others. In acknowledging the reality of these distinctions and relations, however, the question of "how to harmonize these with the monotheistic character of the biblical belief in God and the tradition of philosophical theology" became acute for patristic theology.[43]

Pannenberg identifies two main streams of thought in pre-Nicene and Nicene conceptions. The stream which prevailed in patristic thought eventuated in a view of "the subordination of the Son and Spirit to the monarchy of the Father."[44]. Such a conception is suggested, Pannenberg argues, by Ireneus' image of the Son and Spirit as the "two hands" of God the Father. Pannenberg also identifies Tertullian as one whose trinitarian model of God ascribed subordinate status to the Son and Spirit.[45] If one accepts the subordination of the Son and Spirit, however, the question arises of how one can maintain the full deity of

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[42] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 273.

[43] ibid., 273.

[44] ibid., 274.

[45] ibid., 274.

the Son and Spirit. Moreover, subordination of the Son and Spirit to the monarchy of the Father is closely tied to the ontological question of how they derive their existence from the Father. If the second and third divine principles receive their existence from the Father, how are they nevertheless divine, since creation also receives its existence from God?

With Origen, Pannenberg suggests, the tension between the divine nature of the persons and the notion of origination is directly addressed for the first time. He remarks "[o]nly with Origen's doctrine of the eternal begetting of the Son did the concept emerge of an eternal trinity in God."[46] Pannenberg contends, however, that the application of Origen's concept of eternal generation to all spiritual creatures, and not only to the Son, implies the inferiority of the Son in the order of divinity. The notion of eternal begetting would later be seen to provide linguistic and conceptual differentiation that allows for a distinction to be made between the Son and creation. But in Origen, Pannenberg argues, the idea of eternal begetting does not bring material clarification to the problem of how Son and Spirit can be both 'from the Father', and yet equal in divinity.[47]

Origen's achievement, however, sows a seed which

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[46] ibid., 275.

[47] ibid., 277-8.

germinates in the theology of Athanasius and blossoms in the Cappadocian attempt to account for the constitution and unity of the divine persons. Pannenberg observes that although attempts were made in Cappadocian theology to establish the divine unity as a unity of common outward activity or a unity of genus, the concept of the Father as the origin prevailed as the chief notion.[48] Ultimately, Pannenberg comments, in order to account for the oneness God

> the Cappadocians went back to the older thought that the Father is the source and principle of deity, that the Son and Spirit receive their deity and their unity with the Father from him, and that the Father alone, therefore, is without origin.[49]

The trinitarian problem of how to reconcile the divinity of Father, Son and Spirit with the unity of God, therefore, received its definitive answer in the concept of relations of origin. The life of the one God is characterized by the eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit from the Father.

According to Pannenberg, however, this solution to the problem of the divine unity crystallizes an unresolved tension. Pannenberg writes,

> the idea that the Father is the source and origin of deity so fused the person of the Father and the substance of the Godhead that the divine substance is originally proper to the Father alone, being received from Him by Son and Spirit. [50]

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[48] ibid., 283.

[49] ibid., 279.

[50] ibid., 280.

Pannenberg goes on to conclude that the absence of mutuality in the ontological constitution of the divine persons decisively undermines their equality. If the Son and the Spirit receive their being from the Father, but the Father's being is not received from the Son and Spirit, then one's conception of the divine ontology is inevitably susceptible to the problem of subordinationism. The danger of this slippery slide into subordinationism derives from a logical problem inherent in this conception of God. The asymmetry implied by the concept of relations of origin logically contradicts the equality implied by positing the full divinity of all three persons. In Pannenberg's view this logical tension renders the patristic model incoherent.

Over against this prevailing, and, as he sees it, problem-fraught stream of trinitarian thought, Pannenberg detects in early trinitarian theology an alternative which derives from Athanasius' conception of the intra-divine relations. Pannenberg finds in Athanasius a corrective to the subordinationism inherent in the idea of relations of origin. He writes that

> Athanasius had developed the thought that the idea of distinct persons already implies relations and cannot be achieved without them. Most illuminating in this regard was his success in applying this thought to the relations between the Father and the Son. The Father cannot be thought of as Father without the Son.[51]

Pannenberg concedes that Athanasius held as important the

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[51] ibid., 279.

idea of the Father as the fount of divinity. He nevertheless contends that his notion of the Father-Son relation as logical relation was both more decisive for his trinitarian doctrine and of more enduring value for trinitarian theology. With this idea, according to Pannenberg, Athanasius offers an insight that is more compatible with the idea of divine equality. The logic of the Father-Son relation implies mutual dependence - one cannot exist without the other. Pannenberg suggests that this conception contrasts with the one-sided dependence of the Son on the Father implied by the idea of relations of origin.[52]

It is this alternative stream of trinitarian reflection that Pannenberg will later develop in his own way, as I will show in the next chapter. Because, however, this line of thought remained undeveloped in the Nicene period, Pannenberg concludes:

> It is hard to maintain... that in the process of the debate about the dogma of Nicea and the full deity of the Son and Spirit [that] the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit had been adequately elucidated in the unity of the divine substance.[53]

In effect, according to Pannenberg, the Nicene conception of

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[52] ibid., 280. It should be noted that Pannenberg's interpretation of Athanasius would not find universal acceptance. Pannenberg's attempt to distinguish between relations of origin and logical relations within the Trinity is a procedure which severs from one another concepts that were inseparable for Athanasius himself. See, for example, Peter Widdicombe, The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 159-222.

[53] ibid., 280.

trinitarian relations of origin could not preclude the problem of subordinationism. To establish the divinity of the Son and Spirit as arising from of the generative activity of the Father gave a coherent account of neither the equality nor the unity of the persons. Here the discussion touches on the topic of the second and third chapters of this thesis, in which I examine more closely Pannenberg's rejection of the concept of relations of origin, in favour of his proposed corrective of relations of reciprocal self-distinction.

2. Trinitarian Doctrine in Scholastic and Reformation Theology

With this assessment of Nicene theology in mind, Pannenberg moves on to an examination of later developments in the history of trinitarian theology. He contends that the Nicene solution's reliance on the problematic notion of relations of origin gave rise to internal deficiencies in that model, which created the need for alternative solutions in later theology.[54] As he proceeds to the second phase of his historical analysis, the focus of Pannenberg's discussion shifts - in what initially seems a rather abrupt leap - to the doctrine of God in High Scholasticism. Although the step from Nicene theology to scholastic thought seems to span rather a wide gap, the overall discussion is

[54] ibid., 280.

held together by the common theme of giving satisfactory articulation to the plurality and unity of God. In a compressed style, similar to that of the discussion of patristic theology, Pannenberg assesses the trinitarian theology of the medieval era.

However, although the discussions of patristic and scholastic trinitarian theology are united by common themes, the chronological gap in Pannenberg's treatment is notable for its omission of Augustine. Augustine is not treated in the first part of Pannenberg's analysis, for Pannenberg restricts his examination to the Nicene tradition. The result, however, is that when Augustine is examined, his thought is viewed through the lens of scholastic developments, and an assessment of Augustine on his own terms is not given. The omission of Augustine in his treatment of patristic theology is symptomatic of a major flaw in Pannenberg's overall project. At this stage of the discussion, I am simply suggesting that Pannenberg's ordering of topics in his historical analysis betrays a selectivity that distorts his treatment of patristic trinitarian theology. This contention will be developed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, in which relevant aspects of Augustine's trinitarian thought are examined in detail. As noted in the introduction, the fourth chapter of the thesis offers a critical comparison of Pannenberg's and Augustine's respective treatments of the concept of

relations of origin and the problem of subordinationism.

To return to Pannenberg's historical overview, he contends that the most significant feature of trinitarian thought in the period of High Scholasticism is that consideration of the existence and attributes of the one God is placed prior to the consideration of trinitarian doctrine in the dogmatic structure. This leads to (and is reflective of) a greater concern for the unity at the expense of the plurality of the godhead. According to Pannenberg, this procedure has its basis in Augustine, who addresses, he maintains, the trinitarian problem by insisting

> on the unity of the divine substance prior to all trinitarian differentiation and by defining this unity in such a way as to rule out any idea of substantial distinction even at the cost of making the differentiation of the three persons in God an impenetrable secret.[55]

Augustine's supposed alternative theological construction is taken by Pannenberg to be an appropriation of philosophical categories. To posit an a priori conception of divine substance makes a philosophical conception of divinity the point of departure for trinitarian theology. Pannenberg rejects this alternative because it proposes a basis for trinitarian statements apart from God's self-disclosure in history.

Although, Pannenberg acknowledges, Augustine's trinitarian doctrine does not take the further step of

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[55] ibid., 283.

deriving the three persons from the one essence of God, this is the path taken by medieval theology. Pannenberg, together with many modern critics, thinks that this is a procedure which has its basis in Augustine. The danger arises that an a priori conception of the unity of God in the one divine essence inevitably sets subsequent trinitarian thought in a modalistic direction.

As Pannenberg sees it, the direction Augustine established is taken to its culmination in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. In scholastic theology, he notes, the existence of God was taken to be a truth open to reason, whereas the doctrine of the Trinity was a truth of faith. However, in spite of this presupposition, trinitarian statements lost their basis in biblical revelation and became subsumed under the philosophical concept of the unity of God. Pannenberg observes that "the systematic structure of the doctrine of God in the theological *Summa* of Aquinas is characterized by derivation of the trinitarian statements from the concept of the one God."[56] In this way, we have in Thomas "a combining of natural theology (in the doctrine of the one God and his attributes) and the doctrine of the Trinity, the latter being derived from the former."[57] In light of Pannenberg's twofold standard of reason and revelation, this trinitarian model is found wanting.

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[56] ibid., 287-8.

[57] ibid., 288.

Although the careful systematic structuring of trinitarian statements meets the demand for logical consistency, the tendency toward modalism and the departure from any concrete basis in biblical revelation undermines scholastic trinitarian theology's cogency.

In contrast to this, Pannenberg views the Reformation's attitude toward the Trinity rather more favourably, inasmuch as Protestant theology in that period sought to reclaim a biblical basis for trinitarian conceptions. Ultimately, however, the reformers were unable to overcome the theological heritage of the previous era. The Protestant emphasis on biblical foundations, on the one side, and the tighter systematic structuring of scholastic philosophical theology, on the other, remained unharmonized. The specific problem Pannenberg detects is that the biblically based trinitarian statements of early protestant theology remained framed within the scholastic ordering of dogmatics topics, which place consideration of the essence and attributes of the one God prior to the consideration of trinitarian doctrine. Protestant theology's heightened regard for biblically based theological statements failed to break free from the scholastic structure. The significance of this criticism for Pannenberg can perhaps best be understood in light of his own procedure. A doctrine of God genuinely based in revelation, Pannenberg will contend, has the structural significance of requiring that theology must

place consideration of the Father, Son and Spirit and their mutual relations prior to consideration of the divine unity in the ordering of dogmatic topics. In his own systematics, chapter four, on revelation, precedes the chapter on the doctrine of the Trinity, which is followed in the sixth chapter by the discussion of the unity and attributes of God. The force of Pannenberg's criticism, then, is that Protestant trinitarian theology failed to realize fully the logic of its approach to biblical revelation.

The failure of theology to overcome the problem of this cleavage in approaches has had, according to Pannenberg, lasting negative consequences for trinitarian doctrine. Pannenberg argues that it is because of the "lack of inner connection with the doctrine of the absolute unity of God that the doctrine of the Trinity came under criticism."[58] He regards this cleavage as the source of the decline of trinitarian doctrine as an integral aspect of the doctrine of God in the modern period. He writes

> the moment it appears that the one God can be better understood without rather than with the doctrine of the Trinity, the latter seems to be a superfluous addition to the concept of the one God even though it is treated reverently as a mystery of revelation.[59]

This situation led to the decline of trinitarian theology in the modern period.

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[58] ibid., 290.

[59] ibid., 291.

3. Trinitarian Theology in the Modern Period

In the wake of these developments in scholastic and Reformation theology, Pannenberg discerns two main streams of trinitarian thought. One stream arises out of German idealism in the thought of Lessing and Hegel. Lessing, Pannenberg comments, "was the thinker who rediscovered and reasserted the grounding of the Trinity in the concept of Spirit as an expression of the self-understanding of God in self-awareness."[60] And, along the same lines, Hegel gave classical form to "the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of self-conscious Spirit..."[61] In Pannenberg's estimation, however, the Idealist tradition ultimately fails to provide an adequate trinitarian concept of God. He identifies the problem in this way: "[t]o derive the trinitarian distinctions from the self-differentiation of the divine Spirit in its self awareness is to subsume the threeness of the persons into the concept of a single personal God."[62] A doctrine of God thus conceived is liable to

> a reduction to nontrinitarian monotheism. For all the differentiation in the self-consciousness, the God of this understanding is a single subject. The moments in the self-consciousness have no subjectivity of their own.[63]

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[60] ibid., 292.

[61] ibid., 292.

[62] ibid., 294.

[63] ibid., 295.

For Pannenberg the idealist Trinity is inadequate because it contradicts the biblical account's depiction of three distinct persons. In his view, therefore, the idealist conception is similar to Augustine's concept of undifferentiated divine substance, in that it contradicts the biblical witness's depiction of three separate centres of action.

By contrast, Schleiermacher and his followers in their approach sought to base trinitarian statements "on the historical revelation of God by the Son and Spirit."[64] This avenue of approach gave rise to debate as to whether the biblical statements could be interpreted to indicate intra-divine distinctions in the eternal God. While some nineteenth century thinkers (such as August Twesten and Carl Immanuel Nitzsch) affirmed that the triad of revelation must be linked with the inner life of God, others (such as Friedrich Lucke) argued the opposite, that the revelation of God in the economy of history should not be taken to indicate immanent distinctions within God. This latter argument created an insurmountable difficulty for Protestant trinitarian theology. As Pannenberg explains,

> the step from the biblical statements about the Father, Son and Spirit to the idea of essential trinitarian distinctions was a leap to a very different speculative approach since the idea of an essential Trinity does not arise out of the data of the biblical revelation but out of mere concepts of the divine essence, whether the concept be that of the

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[64] ibid., 293.

divine Spirit or that of the divine love.[65]

In sum then, for Pannenberg these two lines of thought were in themselves inadequate to clarify the trinitarian problem. Taking biblical revelation seriously did not lead obviously to positing immanent distinctions in God. And the concept of God as Absolute, self-conscious Spirit was a speculative approach that, while attractive on some levels, was too far removed from the data of biblical revelation and was liable to modalism.

When Pannenberg turns his attention to the twentieth century heirs of nineteenth century speculation, the fundamental question for trinitarian theology is this: How, can this gap be closed, such that the implicit trinitarianism in biblical revelation and a conception of the divine unity can be coherently integrated? Pannenberg finds the beginnings of a solution in Karl Barth's "impressive revival"[66] of the doctrine of the Trinity. Barth sought to overcome the problem of the Trinity of revelation and the unity of God in a single stroke with his proposal that a trinitarian understanding of God is implicit in the very event of God's self-disclosure. Revelation, Barth contended, is trinitarian in structure, for the God revealed cannot be known apart from the form of revelation (Jesus Christ), nor the effect of revelation (faith created by the

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[65] ibid., 293-4.

[66] ibid., 295.

Holy Spirit). On one side, Barth suggests that for revelation to be possible at all, there must be (trinitarian) diversity within God. On the other side, for it truly to be *God* that is revealed, there must be unity.

However, although he credits Barth with setting trinitarian theology in the right direction, in Pannenberg's estimation Barth's ingenious project does not succeed. He argues that

> the Church Dogmatics does not develop the data of the historical revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit, but from the formal concept of revelation as self-revelation, which, as Barth sees it, entails a subject of revelation, an object, and revelation itself, all of which are one and the same. This model of a Trinity of revelation is easily seen to be structurally identical with that of the self-conscious Absolute, especially when God's revelation has to be viewed primarily as self-revelation.[67]

The distinct persons are not given full conceptual status, for, Pannenberg contends, "Barth subordinated his doctrine of the Trinity to a pre-trinitarian concept of the unity of God..."[68] Pannenberg agrees that Barth was correct in principle to begin from revelation in constructing a satisfactory trinitarian doctrine of God. Ultimately, however, Barth went wrong in basing trinitarian statements on a *concept* of revelation (God as revealer, revelation and revealedness), rather than the *content* of revelation (the

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[67] ibid., 296.

[68] ibid., 299.

historical Jesus).[69] Against Barth's concept of trinitarian revelation, Pannenberg asserts that a trinitarian doctrine of God "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."[70]

Pannenberg's critique of Barth ends his discussion of historical trinitarian theology, and he turns his attention toward preliminary remarks regarding his proposed alternative direction. Oddly, it is only much later in the chapter that Pannenberg acknowledges the importance of Karl Rahner for his trinitarian thought, and to follow consistently the flow of historical trinitarian conversation, Rahner's influence merits mention here.

In his discussion of the Trinity and the God world relation, Pannenberg writes

> Karl Barth demanded that we base the doctrine of the Trinity on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He did not succeed in meeting his own demand, but Karl Rahner has taken it up and sharpened it with his thesis of an identity between the immanent and the economic Trinity.[71]

Rahner's principle that "[t]he "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity"[72] is at the heart of Pannenberg's

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[69] ibid., 303-04.

[70] ibid., 299.

[71] ibid., 327-8.

[72] Karl Rahner, The Trinity, translated by Joseph Donceel (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1970), 22.

trinitarian doctrine of God. Indeed, as is the case with many contemporary theologians of the Trinity, Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God may be viewed as one of numerous attempts to develop the line of thought initiated by Barth and Rahner.[73] With the principle that the immanent and economic Trinity are identical, Pannenberg believes he has found the key to the problem of integrating the content of biblical revelation into a systematic account of the triunity of God. By grounding trinitarian statements in revelation, the eternal identity of God is linked inseparably with the manifestation of that identity in the economy of salvation. In this view, the threeness of God and the character of the relations of Father, Son and Spirit define the eternal, intra-divine life.

Summary

The discussion thus far has sought to give an indication of the main background ideas that undergird Pannenberg's attempt to articulate a trinitarian doctrine of God. First, I observed that the rationalistic orientation of Pannenberg's theology distinguishes his approach to trinitarian doctrine in significant ways. On one level, Pannenberg's approach simply requires dogmatic statements to be self-consistent. A procedure of rational scrutiny of dogmatic statements works to further their correspondence to

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[73] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 328.

the truth of God that is finally revealed eschatologically. On another more remarkable level is the implication for Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of his view of theology as a public enterprise. Stemming from his contention that Christian dogmatic themes correspond to human knowledge gained from other fields of study, he envisions the task of systematic theology as demonstrating rationally the truth of Christian doctrine. This leads him to the contention that the doctrine of Trinity can be grasped through reason. The nature of Pannenberg's goal in this regard accounts to some degree for the persistence of his efforts to purge trinitarian theology both of logical inconsistencies and anachronistic presuppositions.

As well, in the context of the discussion of critical reason, I observed that Pannenberg's novel, if puzzling, conception of eschatological ontology shapes his view that Christian dogmatic statements are to be advanced as hypotheses, awaiting verification at the climax of the world's history. I further observed that Pannenberg's concept of "the ontological priority of the future" and the principle that "God's deity is God's rule" prove to be fundamental to his trinitarian theology.

I noted as well that the rationalistic character of Pannenberg's approach to theology shapes his view of revelation. Rejecting any notion that God's revelation belongs within an inaccessible sphere of human subjectivity,

Pannenberg boldly claims that God's acts of self-revelation are open to view in the data of history. Historical science, therefore, is theology's chief means by which to uncover the significance of God's self-disclosure. Against the background of his eschatological ontology, Pannenberg regards God's revelation in history as proleptic moments, in which God's future reign irrupts into the present. Finally, I noted that taken together Pannenberg's concepts of reason and revelation are the main ingredients of his trinitarian thesis that "trinitarian doctrine simply states explicitly what is implicit already in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and basically in Jesus' historical relationship to the Father who he proclaimed to be the one God."[74]

In the second major division of this chapter I showed how Pannenberg employs his views of reason and revelation to test historical trinitarian theology. Implicit throughout Pannenberg's discussion of traditional views were these questions: Does this trinitarian model articulate, in a logically consistent manner, the idea that the one God exists as three equal divine persons? Does a given trinitarian conception have an adequate basis in revelation? Does a given trinitarian theology withstand historical-critical investigation? In light of his analysis, historical accounts of trinitarian doctrine were for diverse reasons

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[74] Pannenberg, "The Christian Vision of God: The new Discussion of the Trinitarian Doctrine", 54.

found wanting. Nevertheless, Pannenberg maintains that, even in a modern context, a trinitarian conception of God has good reason to be considered the decisive conception of the Christian God. Pannenberg finds a positive way forward in the landmark axiom of the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity. First proposed by Barth, and given new form by Rahner, and finally modified significantly in his own theology, Pannenberg regards his own trinitarian doctrine as a development of this principle. To this topic we now turn.

Chapter 2

Pannenberg's Trinitarian Doctrine of God

The twofold aim of this chapter is (I) to trace the line of thought from Pannenberg's basic trinitarian thesis to his eventual conception of the inner-trinitarian relations; and (II) to examine the implications for his trinitarian doctrine of his view of the God-world relation. In the first section, the discussion simply takes up from the first chapter and demonstrates how Pannenberg's main premises shape his trinitarian doctrine. In the second section, I will consider the significance of Pannenberg's principle that God's deity is his rule for his interpretation of Rahner's axiom of the identity of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity.

Pannenberg constructs a trinitarian doctrine of God on the basis of a historical-critical interpretation of the life and proclamation of Jesus. Through his interpretation of the New Testament and influenced by Hegelian philosophy, Pannenberg defines the character first of the Son-Father relation, and, subsequently, each of the inner-trinitarian relations. What emerges is a concept of trinitarian relations of "reciprocal self-distinction", a concept which, Pannenberg contends, expresses the mutuality of the intra-divine relations in a way superior to the traditional concept of relations of origin. The presentation of Pannenberg's argument from his basic thesis to his proposed

trinitarian ontology sets the stage for the discussion of the third chapter, in which I closely compare the traditional model and Pannenberg's alternative as rival conceptions of the ontology of God.

The treatment of the second topic in this chapter - Pannenberg's view of the God-world relation and the trinitarian relations - points to difficulties with Pannenberg's concept of transcendence. Problems are manifest particularly in Pannenberg's interpretation of Rahner's principle that the economic and immanent Trinity are identical. A preview of this difficulty anticipates the fourth chapter's comparison of Augustine and Pannenberg. While Pannenberg and Augustine are (arguably) in agreement on the point that God's revelation in the economy is the basis for a conception of the immanent trinitarian relations, their radically different concepts of transcendence lead them to different conclusions, particularly with regard to the concept of trinitarian relations of origin.

I. The Biblical Basis for Trinitarian Statements

As noted in the previous chapter, Pannenberg faults Barth's trinitarian doctrine because it is based on a concept of revelation rather than, as Barth had intended, the actual content of revelation. Pannenberg attempts to correct this error by setting forth an analysis of the

figure of the historical Jesus as a foundation for trinitarian statements. As noted previously, Pannenberg proposes that trinitarian doctrine is simply the explication of an understanding of God already implicit in the life and claims of the historical Jesus. In line with his notion of revelation as history, Pannenberg contends that

> [t]o base the doctrine of the Trinity on the content of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ we must begin with the relation of Jesus to the Father as it came to expression in his message of the divine rule.[1]

This starting point is taken to be valid in that it is not based on the outdated substantialist metaphysics presupposed in the patristic and medieval era. Nor is it based on an a priori notion of inspired scripture discredited by the higher criticism of the modern period. Instead, the figure of the historical Jesus is a topic which Pannenberg regards as open to the view of modern scholarship, which is the framework within which he seeks 'publicly' to articulate his trinitarian doctrine.

Pannenberg opens the discussion of God as Trinity by identifying two seminal features of the New Testament kerygma.

> At the heart of the message of Jesus was the announcing of the nearness of the divine reign. But Jesus called the God whose reign was near, and even dawning with his own coming, the (heavenly) Father.[2]

Following recent biblical criticism, Pannenberg identifies

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[1] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 304.

[2] ibid., 259.

the core content of Jesus' proclamation as the dawning of God's eschatological rule. The irruption into the present of the future reign of God is the content of Jesus' message, and this content is embodied in Jesus himself. God's reign is realized proleptically in one unique person. Secondly, inseparable from the message of God's imminent reign, Pannenberg notes Jesus' advance on Jewish dogma entailed in his unique address to God as 'Father'. He observes that

> on the lips of Jesus, 'Father' became a proper name for God. It names the divine Other in terms of whom Jesus saw himself and to whom he referred his disciples and hearers.[3]

The (less than obvious) link between these two aspects of the biblical narrative is this: if Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God proves to be eschatologically valid, as the resurrection proleptically demonstrates, then Jesus' declaration of God as Father is established as the definitive notion of God. A different way of putting it would be to say that God's lordship cannot be thought of apart from God's fatherhood, and vice versa. As his argument unfolds (as will be shown presently), Pannenberg concludes that God as Father cannot be conceived as such without the Son. And, if God is eternally as he is in his revelation, the Son must be the eternal correlate of the Father. This leads Pannenberg to posit the pre-existence of the Son, as a logical development of the idea that the Son is the eternal

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[3] ibid., 262.

correlate of the Father. These ideas require fuller explication.

Pannenberg gleans from his interpretation of Jesus' proclamation of his Father's reign a dual aspect of the Son-Father relation. The two sides of the relation are termed "differentiation" and "dependence". A grasp of the dual character of the relationship between Jesus and God is, for Pannenberg, the first step toward a basis for trinitarian statements.

On the one side, in his proclamation and embodied realization of God's reign, Jesus differentiated himself from God. By "differentiated", Pannenberg means that Jesus directs attention away from himself in order to proclaim the reign of the God he named as Father. Pannenberg observes that "[t]he differentiation of Father and Son is grounded in one and the same event, in the message of Jesus concerning God and his coming kingdom."[4] Jesus himself did not claim divine status. He proclaimed the rule of his Father as the one true God.

On the other side, the corollary of Jesus' actions of self-differentiation from the Father is Jesus' utter dependence on the Father. Indeed, he subordinates himself to the Father's rule and depends on his provision. As Pannenberg observes, "the whole sending of the Son is for

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[4] ibid., 272.

the glory of the Father and his lordship."[5]

Pannenberg brings together the dual aspect of Jesus' relation with the Father (differentiation and dependence) under the term "self-distinction". Unfortunately, it is only after frequent use of the term that he defines what he means by it. In a footnote he clarifies what he intends it to mean:

> The term "self-distinction" has been used in trinitarian theology since the 19th century but almost always in the sense of the bringing forth of a second and third divine person by the Father. Starting with the self-distinction of the Son from the Father, however, we can use the term in a different sense, namely, that *the one who distinguishes himself from another defines himself as also dependent on that other.*[6]

In the text of the Systematics Pannenberg presents his concept of self-distinction as a plausible interpretation of the Son-Father relationship as characterized in the New Testament. Stanley Grenz helpfully points to another influence which shapes Pannenberg's thinking on this theme. Grenz acknowledges with Pannenberg that the idea of "self-distinction" traditionally has had to do with the concept of relations of origin - "the bringing forth of the second and third trinitarian persons through the Father."[7] Pannenberg has, Grenz observes, rejected the traditional concept in favour of a "radical reinterpretation" of self-distinction

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[5] ibid., 309.

[6] ibid., 313, n.167. My emphasis.

[7] Grenz, Reason for Hope, 49.

in light of Hegelian anthropology. In Hegel's view, according to Grenz, "the essence of a person lies in the act of giving oneself to one's counterpart and thereby gaining one's identity from the other."[8] Hence, in this perspective, "the one who differentiates oneself from another is dependent on the other for one's identity."[9]

The resemblance between Hegel's concept of the person and Pannenberg's interpretation of Jesus' relationship with his Father is not difficult to see. Pannenberg's appropriation of this concept, however, would seem to create problems for the development of trinitarian doctrine. How can the self-subordination of Jesus to the Father be reconciled with the idea that Jesus is (equally) divine? Pannenberg needs to find a way to make the step from the subordinationism implicit in the concept of self-distinction to an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus.

In his intriguing solution to this problem, Pannenberg rejects the traditional view that statements that imply Jesus' subordinate status refer to his human nature, whereas other statements in the New Testament indicate his divine nature. This answer, Pannenberg argues, misses "the point that Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God *precisely in his self-distinction from God.*"[10] By this Pannenberg appears

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[8] ibid., 49.

[9] ibid., 49.

[10] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 310. My emphasis.

to suggest that Jesus' obedience and submission to the Father is not a contradiction to, but is an expression of Jesus' deity.

One way to understand Pannenberg's argument here is with reference the contrast he draws between Jesus and Adam. Adam did not fulfil his identity in relation of self-distinction from God. Rather than orient himself toward the reign of God, thus showing his fundamental dependence on God, he sought to supplant God's rule. In contrast, Jesus rejected claims to deity and upheld the deity of the God he proclaimed as Father. By truly fulfilling human, creaturely destiny, he showed himself to be the Son of the Father. Therefore the overall direction of Jesus' efforts to proclaim the reign of God could be construed as an indication of Jesus' deity. Perfect humanity, Pannenberg seems to argue, is suggestive of divinity. Viewed from another angle, Pannenberg appears to be saying that, from the divine standpoint, Jesus' submission to the Father expresses the mutual self-giving that eternally characterizes the trinitarian relations. This argument in itself, however, is only an initial step toward establishing the divinity of the Son.

In further support of his thesis that Jesus' subordinate status expresses, rather than negates his divinity, Pannenberg makes observations on the content of Jesus' message. Implicit in Jesus' proclamation and

obedience to the Father is the suggestion of his unique status. Pannenberg proposes that "if the differentiation of God as Father from his own person is thus constitutive for Jesus' message and attitude, he also realized that he was very closely linked to the Father in his work."[11] He further comments that

> [f]or all his subjection to the Father, Jesus undoubtedly claimed that God is to be understood only as the heavenly Father whom he declared him to be. And since he proclaimed that the Father's kingdom is not only imminent but also dawning in his own work, no room is left for any future talk about God that will replace his.[12]

Building on his thinking about the uniqueness of Jesus and his close link with the Father, Pannenberg goes on to suggest that God as Father cannot be thought of without Jesus. Pannenberg writes,

> as Jesus glorifies the Father by his sending and in his own relation to 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.[13]

Do we yet have, however, a basis for trinitarian doctrine? Thus far in his argument Pannenberg has at most established Jesus as uniquely related to God, perhaps as a subordinate deity. The further steps needed for a full-fledged trinitarian understanding of Jesus requires Pannenberg to employ one of his major premises, mentioned in

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[11] ibid., 263.

[12] ibid., 263-264.

[13] ibid., 310.

the first chapter: God's deity is his rule. In the fifth chapter of the Systematic Theology Pannenberg develops the trinitarian significance of this principle. He explains,

> [t]he rule or kingdom of the Father is not so external to his deity that he might be God without his kingdom. The world as the object of his lordship might not have been necessary to his deity, since its existence owes its origin to his creative freedom, but the existence of the world is not compatible with his deity apart from his lordship over it.[14]

As discussed in the first chapter, the situation of the world in its imperfection hardly realizes the reign of God. Therefore the state of the world calls into question the deity of God. For Jesus to proclaim and embody in his own person the reign of God establishes the reality of God's deity. It therefore follows, for Pannenberg, that God cannot be God without Jesus.

Having set out his concept of self-distinction as the basic content of the relation of Jesus to the Father, and having suggested that this relation, taken together with the principle that God's deity equals his rule, implies the divinity of Jesus as the eternal correlate of the Father, Pannenberg is in a position to take the next, highly significant, step in his account of the trinitarian relations. He proposes that the relation of self-distinction that characterizes the bond of the Son and Father is the basic content of *each of* the intra-divine relations. The Father differentiates himself from and depends on the Son

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[14] ibid., 313.

and Spirit. The Spirit differentiates himself from and depends on the Father and Son. Thus Pannenberg expands his core concept to apply to each of the trinitarian relations. These relations are, in his view, relations of *reciprocal* self-distinction.

Pannenberg first comments on the Father's relation to the Son:

> If the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father is constitutive for the fact that even in the eternal God there must be a counterpart to the Father, i.e., the Son, then the question arises whether the same can be said about the relation of the Father to the Son, so that on the Father's side the distinction from the Son is posited by a self-distinction of the Father.[15]

Pannenberg answers this question in the affirmative. He adduces biblical texts which indicate that the principle of self-distinction applies to the Father's relation to the Son, thus expanding his key concept of trinitarian relations to 'reciprocal self-distinction'. The clearest example adduced is 1 Corinthians 15:24-25. In this passage, on one side, the Father has bestowed all power and authority to the Son. This text exemplifies the principle that the Father's reign is realized through the Son, and indeed depends upon the Son. On the other side, in this text, at the eschaton the Son restores all things to the Father, reciprocally surrendering the rule entrusted to him. Employing the principle that God's deity equals his rule, Pannenberg finds in this mutual giving over of the kingdom a better basis for

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[15] ibid., 311.

understanding the Father-Son relation than that supplied by 'begetting'. He concludes that

> [t]he handing over of the power and rule of the Father to the Son is then to be seen also as a defining of the intratrinitarian relations between the two, as is also their handing back by the Son to the Father.[16]

Moreover, he suggests that in the act of self-distinction Jesus receives his deity from the Father, and the application of this principle to the Father suggests that, in some sense, the Father receives his deity from the Son.[17]

To complete the picture, Pannenberg considers the identity of the Spirit in light of the Father-Son relation. Pannenberg observes that "the Spirit of God is either presupposed or expressly named as the medium of the communion of Jesus with the Father and the mediator of the participation of believers in Christ."[18] In keeping with the biblical theme that the Spirit served as the mode of God's presence for the prophets and in creation, Pannenberg contends that the relationship of Jesus with God as Father likewise necessitates conceiving of a third principle by which the creaturely Jesus and the divine Father relate. Indeed, Pannenberg affirms, the groundwork for plurality within the divine is already laid in the Old Testament view of the Spirit as God's presence. It is in the light of the

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[16] ibid., 313.

[17] ibid., 311.

[18] ibid., 266.

deity of the Son and the involvement of the Spirit as God's presence in the work of the Son and in sustaining the Father-Son fellowship that the doctrine of the Trinity has its basis. Pannenberg explains, "although the concept of the Holy Spirit is a familiar one from the Old Testament, only in connection with the relation of Father and Son is the Spirit seen to be an independent third principle of the divine reality."[19] The biblical concept of the presence of the Spirit shaped the Christian understanding of God as Trinity and "not [as] a biunity of the Father and the Son."[20] Indeed, Pannenberg asserts,

> if the Spirit were not constitutive for the fellowship of the Son with the Father, the Christian doctrine of the deity of the Spirit would be a purely external addition to the confession of the relation of the Son to the deity of Father.[21]

In line with his previous arguments regarding the Father and the Son's relations of self-distinction, Pannenberg's view of the 'necessity' of the Spirit as a third "constitutive" divine principle only becomes clear in the context of his understanding of the interdependent nature of the divine persons. Pannenberg's understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit is most clearly seen in his discussion of the trinitarian significance of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. In the crucifixion "Jesus took upon

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[19] ibid., 272.

[20] ibid., 268.

[21] ibid., 268.

himself the ultimate consequence of his self-distinction from the Father..."[22] In this event as well, the deity of both the Father and the Son is called into question, for here it seems that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed is doomed to failure. The resurrection of the Son, however, forever vindicates his message, and while a prima facie reading of the biblical texts would indicate that the resurrection is a trinitarian event - the result of the joint working of all three persons - decisive significance should be attached to the Spirit as the agent through whom the resurrection occurs.[23] Rehearsing a now familiar theme, Pannenberg concludes that the deity of the Father and Son therefore depends on the activity of the Spirit. Since the Spirit's activity is indispensable to establishing the rule of God, and God's deity is his rule, the Spirit constitutes the deity of the Father and the Son. On the principle that the deity of God is inseparable from the reign of God, actions of the Son and Spirit which effectively realize God's reign are taken to be constitutive of the being of God.

Pannenberg supports his argument for the deity of the Spirit by reference to the Johannine conception of the Spirit as 'another Paraclete', a description which suggests an identity similar to that of the Son. He refers to the

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[22] ibid., 314.

[23] ibid., 314-315. In support, Pannenberg cites Rom. 1:4, 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:44ff.

work of the Spirit in the church in glorifying the Father and the Son as an activity similar to Jesus' work in proclaiming God's eschatological rule, a work in which he, like the Son, points away from himself. Pannenberg writes that

> we have a self-distinction which constitutes the Spirit a separate person from the Father and the Son and relates to them both. As Jesus glorifies the Father and not himself, and precisely in so doing shows himself to be the Son of the Father, so the Spirit glorifies not himself but the Son, and in him the Father.[24]

Therefore the form of self-distinction that characterizes the Spirit's relation to the other two persons resembles that of the Son, in its orientation toward affirming the Father's deity and rule, and differs in that the Spirit affirms the deity of the Son also. In common, the content of each trinitarian person's relation to the others is self-distinction. The actual form of each relation of self-distinction, however, differs for each person, as can be seen by their different roles in the economy of salvation.

Pannenberg's proposal for a concept of trinitarian relations of reciprocal self-distinction as a needed advance on the classical concept of relations of origin is a complex subject. The driving force behind his efforts at revision is his pursuit of the course begun by Barth and Rahner, to discern from the trinitarian relations in the economy a precise picture of the immanent trinitarian relations.

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[24] ibid., 315.

Pannenberg's own progress on this path is guided by his particular views of the relationship between of reason and revelation. A more detailed analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian ontology vis-a-vis the classical model awaits the third and fourth chapters of this thesis. The discussion turns now to the important related issue in Pannenberg's thought of the trinitarian relations and the God-world relation.

II. The Trinity and the God-World Relation

The significance of Pannenberg's concept of trinitarian relations of reciprocal self-distinction for his understanding of the God-world relation is a complex and, in my view, ultimately puzzling subject. On the basis of the principle that God's deity equals his rule, and in light of the mutual activity of the three persons in realizing the divine reign in creation, Pannenberg arrives at a conception of trinitarian relations in which the persons mutually constitute one another.

What does this line of thought imply about the God-world relation? Pannenberg writes that "extending the thought of Rahner, one might say that creation is brought into the relations of the trinitarian persons and participates in them."[25] Taken to its logical conclusion, Rahner's axiom can only mean for Pannenberg that the

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[25] ibid., 328.

Father's deity is in some sense dependent on the outcome of the history of the world. Pannenberg writes

> in an advance on Rahner the person of the Father is thus implicated also in the course of salvation history, and indeed in such a way that the progress of events decides concerning his deity as well as the deity of the Son.[26]

Just as the crucifixion cast into doubt the deity of the Son, and the resurrection vindicated the Son absolutely, so also the clearly imperfect history of the world casts into doubt the deity of the Father, such that only the eschatological completion of creation, can vindicate the Father.

The question that remains unresolved is in what sense the being of the Father is dependent on the events of history. Is it a question of epistemology, in that from a human standpoint it appears that God's deity is doubtful until its eschatological verification? Or is a question of ontology, such that the very being of God is at stake with the outcome of history?

In some places, it seems that for Pannenberg it merely appears that God's being depends on the outcome of world history. The uncertainty about God's existence is merely indicative of the limited human standpoint, and is thus an issue of epistemology. For example, he refutes the idea of

> a divine becoming in history, as though the trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with the eschatological

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[26] ibid., 329.

> consummation. *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 on the coming of the kingdom.[27]

These assertions suggest that God's dependence on world history is simply a matter of appearance. However, on the heels of these assertions Pannenberg continues:

> But the eschatological consummation of the kingdom 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. It is simply necessary to take into account the constitutive significance of this consummation for the eternity of God.[28]

In the last sentence of this quotation, the notion that the consummation of the kingdom has "constitutive significance... for the eternity of God" appears strongly to suggest that God depends ontologically on the outcome of world history. As well, I noted above that Pannenberg asserts that the Father is "implicated" in the course of salvation history "in such a way that the progress of events decides concerning his deity as well as the deity of the Son."[29] Moreover, although Pannenberg "refutes" the idea of a "divine becoming" in history, he contends that modern theology rightly sees that "differentiating the eternal

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[27] ibid., 331. My italics.

[28] ibid., 331.

[29] ibid., 329.

Trinity from all temporal change makes trinitarian theology one-sided and detaches it from its biblical basis."[30] Indeed, Pannenberg contends that only by recognizing that the events of history are of constitutive significance for the deity of God

> can we give life to [Rahner's] thesis regarding the identity of the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, for now the immanent Trinity itself, the deity of the trinitarian God, is at issue in the events of history.[31]

How can Pannenberg's assertions about the transcendent freedom of God be reconciled with his contention that the immanent Trinity is "at issue" in the events of history? In my view a reconciliation is not possible. The problem obviously traces back to the "ontological priority of the future" in Pannenberg's theology, and I have already indicated that even sympathetic interpreters suggest that this idea has not been sufficiently worked out in Pannenberg's thought. Pannenberg attempts to walk a fine line between classical theism and process thought with the idea that God's dependence on the world is a freely self-chosen dependence. In the end, however, it is not clear that Pannenberg's theology presents a coherent concept of divine transcendence.

The particular relevance of this question for the topic at hand is that one's notion of divine transcendence

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[30] ibid., 333.

[31] ibid., 330.

directly influences one's interpretation of the principle that the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are identical. If one assumes that the trinitarian God transcends creation, yet has genuinely revealed himself to the world, it seems that one must differentiate between dogmatic statements that describe God in himself and statements that refer to God in relation to the world. This is the procedure followed in classical theology, which has distinguished between, for example, the fatherhood of God within the eternal Trinity, and the lordship of God over creation. Pannenberg refrains from making such a distinction. He refuses to make statements about the eternal God that do not stem directly from the biblical witness to the realization of God's reign in the world. The question arises, however, whether given Pannenberg's perspective it is any longer meaningful to speak of an 'immanent' Trinity. The dependence of the immanent Trinity on the eschatological completion of God's reign of creation seems to absorb the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explain how Pannenberg's concept of the trinitarian relations as relations of "reciprocal self-distinction" arises as a development of his basic trinitarian thesis. The following chapter examines more closely the content and significance of this revision. I have also attempted to expose

difficulties surrounding Pannenberg's juxtaposition of the interdependent trinitarian relations and the God world relation. Pannenberg's particular interpretation of Rahner's axiom seems to compromise a coherent notion of divine transcendence, and to undermine the significance of the idea of an immanent Trinity. This latter point will be revisited in the fourth chapter, in light of Augustine's contrasting procedure.

Chapter 3

Pannenberg's Critique and Revision of the Concept of Relations of Origin

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is threefold: (I) to examine Pannenberg's refutation of the biblical grounds for the concept of relations of origin; (II) to clarify the content and significance of Pannenberg's revised concept of the trinitarian relations by means of a comparison with the classical model; and (III) to reflect critically on whether Pannenberg's revised concept of the trinitarian relations succeeds in overcoming the problem of subordinationism.

In the first part of the chapter, I will show that Pannenberg rejects the biblical support traditionally adduced for the notion of the divine processions because is (1) exegetically indefensible and (2) reductionistic, in that certain biblical ideas are selected at the expense of others in forming a concept of the trinitarian relations. The discussion then proceeds in the second section to the complex task of elucidating Pannenberg's concept of trinitarian relations of reciprocal self-distinction. In this phase of the discussion, the task of discerning a clear picture of Pannenberg's understanding of the trinitarian

relations from his intricate argument is not an easy one. Although he offers descriptions of each particular trinitarian relation on the basis of the biblical witness, a precise definition of these relations is not given, nor is terminology proposed to replace the classical terms "begetting" and "breathing". I attempt to clarify Pannenberg's conception of the intra-divine relations by comparing his ideas with the classical understanding of the eternal processions within God. This comparison leads me to propose my own terminology to denote Pannenberg's alternatives to the traditional language of "begetting" and "breathing".

In light of my elucidation of Pannenberg's concept of trinitarian relations of reciprocal self-distinction, in the chapter's third section I will suggest that Pannenberg's attempt to comply with his twofold standard of conformity to reason and revelation creates tensions in his argument that threaten to undermine its cogency. Specifically, I will pursue Roger Olson's criticism that Pannenberg has not been able successfully to avoid the problem of subordinationism. It seems that in the final analysis, Pannenberg's attempt to base the equality of the trinitarian persons on the mutual dependence of the persons on one another in the work of establishing the reign of God remains in conflict with he biblical fact that it is primarily the Father's reign. Attention to these tensions in Pannenberg's argument

prepares the way for a more detailed critical assessment in the following chapter.

I. The Biblical Basis for Pannenberg's Rejection of the Traditional Model

From the standpoint of biblical revelation, two related criticisms form the basis of Pannenberg's rejection of the notion of trinitarian relations of origin. He first contends that the biblical support traditionally adduced for this concept is indefensible by the standards of modern exegesis. Pannenberg's second criticism stems from his application of Rahner's axiom that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity are identical. Pannenberg takes this axiom to imply that the totality of the biblical narrative's depiction of the activity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit provides the basis for understanding the eternal interrelationships of the divine persons. This procedure leads to what Pannenberg sees as a broader and more complex understanding of the intra-divine relations than that allowed for by the doctrine of relations of origin.

On the first point, Pannenberg focuses his attack on the way biblical notions of the 'begetting' of the Son and 'breathing' of the Spirit have been erroneously understood, as he sees it, in traditional theology. These biblical terms have been taken to refer to eternal processions within God, in careful distinction from God's actions in the economy of

salvation of sending the Son and giving the Spirit. Pannenberg argues, however, that "[t]hese sharp distinctions between begetting and breathing on the one side, sending and gift on the other, can perhaps be justified linguistically but can hardly be justified exegetically."[1] In actual fact, according to Pannenberg, the notions of begetting and breathing are simply to be numbered among the diverse metaphors that express the sending of the Son and Spirit into the world. He observes that this lack of biblical support does not in itself preclude the possibility eternal processions within God, but such a notion cannot be based on individual verses.

With regard to the "begetting" of the Son, Pannenberg comments on the New Testament applications of Psalm 2:7 to Jesus. In Luke 3:22, for example, the words of this text are put in the voice of the Father at the occasion of Jesus' baptism. He declares, "'You are my son, today I have begotten you.'"[2] Pannenberg comments that the 'today' of the text refers not to "the today of eternity which knows no past or future."[3] Rather the baptism of Jesus is simply to be taken as the fulfilment of a biblical saying, much as Jesus fulfils the prophetic hope of Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke

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[1] ibid., 305.

[2] ibid., 306.

[3] ibid., 306.

4:21).[4] In Acts 13:33 the same Psalm text is taken to refer to the resurrection, and the Psalm's use in the epistle to the Hebrews (1:5, 5:5) has in view the installation of Jesus as high priest. "Always," Pannenberg comments, "the NT references to this verse find its fulfilment in the historical person of Jesus Christ."[5]

With regard to the "breathing" (or "spirating") of the Spirit, Pannenberg comes to similar conclusions as with the "begetting" texts. In John 20:22, for example, the breathing of the Spirit has to do with the post-resurrection bestowal of the Spirit on the disciples. There is, Pannenberg asserts, "no reference to an eternal breathing."[6] In the cases of both the begetting of the Son and the breathing of the Spirit, therefore, we have indications of God's actions in the economy of salvation, not suggestions as to the eternal processions in God.

When I examine Pannenberg's project in light of themes in Augustine's trinitarian doctrine, this question of the biblical basis for the classical concepts will need to be revisited. While I do not intend to quarrel with Pannenberg's treatment of individual biblical texts, it is not clear that Pannenberg's understanding of the patristic procedure for identifying the biblical basis for the

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[4] ibid., 306.

[5] ibid., 306.

[6] ibid., 306.

traditional concepts matches the procedure actually followed in patristic trinitarian theology. Nor is it clear that the argument that these biblical ideas refer to God's actions in history, as opposed to eternal trinitarian relations, succeeds in establishing the irrelevance of these ideas for attaining insight into the eternal trinitarian relations. In view of the principle of the identity of the economic and the immanent Trinity, it seems logical to ask what significance these actions in history have for an understanding of the immanent Trinity. The fourth chapter's comparison with Augustine provides a context in which to develop this line of thought further.

In light of his exegetical arguments, Pannenberg moves on to the second aspect of his biblical critique. He contends that the biblical concepts of the begetting of the Son and the breathing of the Spirit have, in traditional theology, been wrongly singled out as definitive traits of the trinitarian relations. The traditional view evidences a selectivity that precludes from consideration aspects of the biblical witness that ought to inform a proper conception of the divine ontology. Having sought to demonstrate the absence of a sound textual basis in patristic thought for the concept of relations of origin, Pannenberg proceeds to identify a kind of implicit reductionism as a more significant weakness of this concept. In his interpretation, conceiving of the trinitarian relations merely as begetting

and breathing reduces the complex New Testament account of the diverse, mutual relations of the trinitarian persons to an overly simple account of merely one-sided relations. To understand this criticism I need first to revisit themes presented previously.

As the second chapter of this thesis has shown, Pannenberg perceives the hallmark feature of the relations of Father, Son and Spirit to be interdependence. He writes

> [r]elations of the three persons that are defined as mutual self-distinction cannot be reduced to relations of origin in the traditional sense. The Father does not merely beget the Son. He also hands over his kingdom to him and receives it back from him. The Son is not merely begotten of the Father. He is also obedient to him and he thereby glorifies him as the one God. The Spirit is not just breathed. He also fills the Son and glorifies him in his obedience to the Father, thereby glorifying the Father himself.[7]

The idea of relations of origin, in Pannenberg's estimation, truncates the understanding of trinitarian relations found in revelation. On the basis of the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity, Pannenberg contends that all of the indications in the New Testament of interdependence between the trinitarian persons must factor into an account of the ontology of the Trinity. On this basis, he argues for the appropriateness of his concept of relations of reciprocal self-distinction, over against the overly "simplistic"[8] notion of relations of origin.

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[7] ibid., 320.

[8] ibid., 320.

In this light, Pannenberg regards his task as correcting the error of reductionism by providing a fuller and more nuanced account of the intra-divine relations.

> When scripture bears witness to the active relations of the Son and Spirit to the Father, it is not good enough to treat these as not constitutive for their identity and in this respect to look only at the relations of begetting and proceeding (or breathing), viewing solely the relations of origin, which lead from the Father to the Son and Spirit, as applicable to the constitution of the persons. None of the other relations is merely incidental to the Son and Spirit in their relation to the Father. All have a place in the distinctiveness and fellowship of the trinitarian persons.[9]

In this passage, Pannenberg contrasts relations that are taken to be "constitutive" of the divine life with relations that are regarded as "incidental" to the divine life. Biblical themes of begetting and breathing traditionally have been taken as "constitutive", whereas other "active relations" such as the Son's sharing of the Father's reign or the Spirit's glorification of Father and Son have been understood as "incidental" relations. Pannenberg presents a corrective conception of mutual constitution or interdependence, in which all aspects of biblical revelation are indispensable components of meaning that together comprise a basis for understanding the divine ontology.

In sum, for Pannenberg the notion of trinitarian relations of origin fails to comply with his requirement

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[9] ibid., 320.

that trinitarian statements must have a basis in revelation, and that in its entirety. His alternative model of relations of reciprocal self-distinction is intended to succeed where the traditional model fails. However, as the discussion now turns to a consideration of Pannenberg's modification, the question to be borne in mind is whether his revision succeeds in meeting his related criterion for trinitarian statements, that they must be logically consistent. Particularly at issue, as noted previously, is the seeming disparity between a concept of trinitarian equality and the apparent priority of the Father in the biblical materials.

II. Trinitarian Relations of Reciprocal Self-Distinction

In chapter two I drew attention to Pannenberg's definition of "self-distinction" as a relation in which "the one who distinguishes himself from another defines himself as also dependent on that other".[10] A relation of self-distinction therefore has a dual aspect - differentiation and dependence - which can be seen in each of the trinitarian relations. Regarding the Son, in the New Testament Jesus differentiates himself from the Father by the action of proclaiming his reign. This action also reveals a passive dependence on the Father, who directs and empowers the Son. In his corresponding

[10] ibid., 313, n. 167.

relation the Father differentiates himself from the Son by giving all authority to the Son. This act of bestowal reciprocates the Son's act of proclamation of the Father's deity. The Father also has a passive component in his relation to the Son, in that he depends on the Son for the realization of his reign. The Spirit differentiates himself from Father and Son by glorifying the Father and the Son. Moreover, the Spirit creates within humankind the confession of the lordship of the Son, and so proclaims the deity of the Father of the Son. Passively, the Spirit depends on Father and Son. He responds to the direction of the Father and Son, and serves as their bond of unity. By underscoring the nature and significance of these "active relations" between the trinitarian persons Pannenberg claims that he accounts more adequately for the complexity of the "richly structured nexus" of the intra-divine relationships. His efforts are intended to work toward defining "the relational nexus of the perichoresis more accurately, and also [to] show how it establishes the unity of the divine life, which seems to be inwardly established in Cappadocian teaching merely by the origination of Son and Spirit from the Father."[11]

Pannenberg intends his concept of reciprocal self-distinction to answer the question of how each

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[11] ibid., 320-321.

trinitarian person is equally divine. The equality of the persons, he contends, has its basis in the mutuality of the relations. Since, for Pannenberg, the basic content (self-distinction) of the relations is common to each of the persons, each person has full status within the godhead. Establishing a more equal and balanced trinitarian conception, however, raises the important question of whether Pannenberg has compromised his requirement of compliance with biblical revelation. Does Pannenberg's 'equilateral' trinitarian model adequately account for such New Testament themes as the priority of the Father? How can Pannenberg reconcile the equality of the trinitarian persons with the priority ascribed to the Father in the New Testament?

To resolve this problem, Pannenberg introduces into his argument a subtle distinction. He argues that although self-distinction is the *content* of the individual relations between Father, Son and Spirit, the *form* that self-distinction takes differs in each relation. The identical content of each relation allows for a logical account of equal divinity. To posit a difference in form in each relation gives Pannenberg a way to let the biblical text influence his account of the specific shape each relation takes. The best way to explain this subtle point is to draw on the classical view of the trinitarian relations as a frame of

reference.

In The God of Jesus Christ Walter Kasper outlines the classical understanding of the divine relations as eternal processions.

> The two processions in God yield four such relations:
> 1. The relation of the Father to the Son: active generation (*generare*) or Fatherhood;
> 2. The relation of the Son to the Father: passive generation (*generari*) or sonship;
> 3. The relation of the Father and the Son to the Holy Spirit: active spiration (*spirare*);
> 4. The relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son: passive spiration (*spirari*).[12]

On the basis of the above taxonomy, the relation of the Son to the Father is traditionally termed "being begotten", and the Father's relation to the Son "begetting". The Father and Son's relation to the Spirit is "breathing", and, from the perspective of the Spirit, the relation is "being breathed". The classical understanding ultimately posits three relations within God: fatherhood, sonship and passive spiration.[13]

As noted previously, Pannenberg's attempt to define the different forms of the trinitarian relations on the basis of the actions in the economy is not clearly suggestive of the model of the divine ontology he envisions. The step from Pannenberg's intricate descriptions (to be quoted presently) of each person's relations, to a clear grasp of his conception of each relation, is made difficult by the

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[12] Kasper, 279.

[13] ibid., 280.

absence of terminology to express these relations. Grenz, in commenting on Pannenberg's rejection of the reductionism of the traditional terms, notes that

> Pannenberg declares that this terminology must be expanded to include concepts such as *giving over* and *receiving back*, *obedience* and *glorification*, and *filling* and *glorifying* if the full New Testament presentation is to be reflected in the doctrine of God.[14]

Neither Grenz nor Pannenberg, however, take the step of advancing such terms. Grenz adds that Pannenberg "finds that all these relations belong to the community of the three persons, so that none of the persons can be identified with one specific relation."[15] While this comment is accurate to the degree that Pannenberg wishes to avoid the kind of reductionism he finds in the traditional terminology, it is not sensitive to the distinctions Pannenberg wishes to maintain between the different forms of the relations. Pannenberg's arguments in the Systematics lend themselves to sharper definition than Grenz suggests is possible. In order to provide such definition, I will propose terms intended to reflect both the common content and unique form of each relation.

Pannenberg observes that the Son's relation of self-distinction to the Father takes this form:

> [o]nly of the Son may we say that the other person from whom he distinguishes himself, i.e., the Father,

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[14] Grenz, Reason for Hope, 52.

[15] ibid., 52.

> is the only God, and that the Son's own deity is grounded in the fact that he thus subjects himself to the Father.[16]

The self-subordinating actions of Jesus to establish the rule of the Father, in Pannenberg's view, denote the character of the relation of the Son to the Father. In line with Pannenberg's view, the form of the Son's relation to the Father, rather than "being begotten", might better be termed "receiving-realizing". The first element of such a term, "receiving", corresponds to the traditional notion of the begetting of the Son. The term "receiving" accounts for the Son's passive relation to the Father, without interpreting this passive relation as origination. The second element of the term, "realizing", expresses the active dimension of the Son's relation to the Father. The Son realizes (or actualizes) the Father's reign in the economy of salvation, and, on the basis of the principle that God's deity equals his rule, Pannenberg concludes that within the eternal God, the Father's own being is realized only through the Son. The Father's deity depends on the Son for its realization.

In contrast, the self-distinction of the Father from the Son does not take this same form. Concerning this relation Pannenberg writes,

> [t]he self-distinction of the Father from the Son and Spirit with respect to the deity of both takes yet another form. The Father does not recognize the one

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[16] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 321.

> God in the Son in distinction from himself, but he hands it over to the Son so as to have it anew in him, as Athanasius puts it... [I]n respect of the relation of the Father to the Son and the Spirit we must still speak of a self-distinction of the Father as regarding his deity, for the revelation of the deity and lordship of the Father depends on the work of the Son and Spirit.[17]

In the case of the Father, once again, both active and passive aspects of the relations must be accounted for. The form of the Father's relation of self-distinction could perhaps be termed "entrusting-depending" in contrast with traditional terms "begetting" and "breathing", which indicate only the active. The Father does not realize the deity of the Son in the same way that the Son's life and proclamation realizes the deity of the Father. Rather, the Father "entrusts" his lordship to the Son in such a way that his lordship "depends" on the obedience of Son and the glorifying activity of the Spirit.

As with the form of the relations that characterize the Father and Son, Pannenberg gives only a general indication of the nature of the Spirit's relation to the Son and Father. He writes,

> the Son's own deity is grounded in the fact that he... subjects himself to the deity of the Father. The Spirit, of course, also shows his deity by teaching us to recognize and confess the Son as Kyrios (1 Cor. 12:3), i.e., by recognizing and confessing the deity of another person, namely the Son. Nevertheless, the Son is not the only God in the confession of the Spirit - he is Kyrios only as the Son of the Father - nor is doxology the only work of the Spirit. The Spirit was earlier given to the Son permanently and

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[17] ibid., 322.

> without measure so as to equip him for his work. Thus the form of the self-distinction of the Spirit from the Son and the Father is different from that of the Son in relation to the Father.[18]

In this passage Pannenberg notes the active and passive dimensions of the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son. Like the Son, the Spirit's relation features the action of proclaiming another as God. Unlike the Son, however, the Spirit's relation in this respect has two objects - the Son and through him the Father. Regarding the passive aspect of the relation, again the Spirit's relation to the Father resembles that of the Son to the Father. As the Son is sent, the Spirit is given. Added to an already complex picture is Pannenberg's comment that the filling of the Son by the Spirit must be taken into account in our final conclusions about the intra-trinitarian life. Pannenberg elsewhere says of this aspect of the Spirit's role that Augustine's notion of the Spirit as the bond of fellowship between Father and Son is close to the mark. He affirms that "Augustine rightly described the Spirit as the bond of union between the Father and the Son."[19] However, Pannenberg obviously rejects the related idea that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. He contends that such a conclusion is possible only "if one presupposes that the intratrinitarian relations

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[18] ibid., 321.

[19] ibid., 317.

are solely relations of origin."[20]

How might these various descriptions of the Spirit's relation be termed? By analogy with the Son, the term, "receiving-realizing", likewise applies to the Spirit's relation to the Father. Like the Son, the Spirit realizes the reign and therefore establishes the deity of the Father.[21] Regarding the Spirit's relation to the Son, I propose the term "responding-establishing". The Spirit's confession of the deity of the Son is similar to, yet distinct from, the way in which the Spirit establishes the deity of the Father. The confession of the Son as Kyrios establishes the deity of the Son in a manner that simultaneously proclaims the deity of the Father. As well, the term "establish" may also be employed to denote to the Spirit's unique function of uniting the Father and Son - 'establishing' the bond between them. The term "responding" characterizes the passive aspect of the Spirit's relation, in that it receives direction for action from Father and Son.

In sum, I propose the following terms to denote Pannenberg's conception of the specific forms of the intra-divine relations: "receiving-realizing" denotes the relation of the Son to the Father (contra "being begotten") and, by analogy, the Spirit to the Father (contra "being breathed");

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[20] ibid., 317.

[21] ibid., 321.

the term "entrusting-depending" denotes the Father's relation to the Son and the Spirit (contra "begetting" and "breathing"); and the term "responding-establishing" expresses the Spirit's relation to the Son. These hyphenated terms are meant to convey both the dual aspect of the content of each relation of self-distinction (differentiation-dependence), as well as represent the different form each relation takes.

My attempt to provide a vocabulary for Pannenberg's trinitarian ontology is intended to clarify his conception of the divine relations vis-a-vis the classical model. As well, these terms are meant to define more precisely the form each relation takes. Here I have attempted an advance on Pannenberg's argument by focusing in specific terms an array of his individual statements which describe the distinct forms of each relation. However, the attempt to subsume the form of each relation under individual (albeit hyphenated) terms may still be, in Pannenberg's estimation, an oversimplification. Though I have sought to account for the various nuances of Pannenberg's intricate argument, it may be that he leaves his definitions of each relation intentionally vague. As he writes "[t]he persons cannot be identical simply with any one relation. Each is a catalyst of many relations."[22] Nonetheless, this terminological approximation of Pannenberg's trinitarian conception lays

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[22] ibid., 320.

out his position more clearly for analysis.

III. Critical Comments

Measured against the classical view, one of the most significant aspects of Pannenberg's conception is his revision of the active and passive aspects of each relation. In the classical account of the constitution of divinity, the active relations (generation and spiration) of the Father correspond to the passive relations of Son and Spirit. In Pannenberg's revision, the basic structure of each trinitarian relation has both an active and a passive dimension. Each trinitarian person's act of differentiation expresses the active dimension of the relation. The dependence implied in each person's act of differentiation expresses a passive dimension. The dual aspect of each relation thus evidences a symmetry and supports a concept of reciprocity that, according to Pannenberg, is more true to the affirmation of the equal divinity of the persons.

As I have repeatedly observed, Pannenberg seeks to articulate a trinitarian doctrine of God that is both logically consistent and biblically based. The subtlety and complexity of Pannenberg's position results from the twofold nature of his goal. On one side, logical consistency requires that his concept of relations of reciprocal self-distinction establish the equality of each of the trinitarian persons. On the other side, aspects of biblical

revelation such as the priority ascribed to the Father suggest an asymmetry in the relations which, on the surface, appears to undermine a concept of intra-divine equality. Pannenberg attempts to overcome this difficulty by means of his distinction between the content and form of each relation. The identical content of each relation (differentiation-dependence) implies symmetry. The difference in the forms of the trinitarian relations, which are reflective of the biblical depiction of the relations, accounts for the apparent asymmetry.

Roger Olson questions, however, whether Pannenberg succeeds in his attempt to reconcile the equality of the persons with the New Testament depiction of the priority of the Father. Olson perceptively remarks that Pannenberg

> believes that Subordinationism is decisively avoided by making the Father dependent on the Son as well as vice-versa. While that would certainly represent a major modification of any known type of Subordinationism, it does not seem very clear how this so excludes it. In Pannenberg's scheme it appears that the Father is 'God' in a special sense not true of the Son and the Holy Spirit *even* though they make an essential contribution to his deity.[23]

Pannenberg's treatment of the theme of the Father's monarchy exemplifies the problem. He affirms that "[t]he mutuality and mutual dependence of the persons of the Trinity, not merely as regards their personal identity but also as regards their deity, do not mean that the monarchy of the

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[23] Roger Olson, "Pannenberg on the Trinity", 203.

Father is destroyed."[24] Rather, he contends "by their work the Son and the Spirit serve the monarchy of the Father", with the qualification that "the Father does not have kingdom or monarchy without the Son or the Spirit."[25] The form of the Son's self-distinction from the Father, even in eternity, is such that he subjects himself to the Father, and is at the same time the "locus of the monarchy of the Father."[26] This account of the Father's monarchy typifies the manner in which Pannenberg integrates concepts of the Father's priority into his concept of trinitarian reciprocity. As I see it, two problems in Pannenberg's argument can be detected.

First, while Olson rightly identifies the tension present in Pannenberg's attempt to reconcile the monarchy of the Father with the equality of the trinitarian persons, he does not identify the conflicting demands of Pannenberg's twofold standard of reason and revelation as a source of this tension. Logical consistency requires an account of the equality of the persons; revelation requires an account of the priority of the Father. Pannenberg's methodology precludes him from taking a route such as that pursued by Walter Kasper, mentioned previously, that such matters of trinitarian doctrine lie beyond comprehension. Nor, as will

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[24] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 324.

[25] ibid., 324.

[26] ibid., 325.

be presently shown, is Pannenberg able to take the route Augustine follows to divest trinitarian statements from subordinationist connotations. Pannenberg's clever attempt to resolve the question by means of a distinction between the content and form of the relations follows through consistently with Pannenberg's premises. However, the resultant notions of "receiving-realizing", "entrusting-depending" and "responding-establishing" are suggestive of the priority of the Father. Pannenberg seems to want to say that this is merely indicative of the different character of each relation, not of origination within God, which Pannenberg takes inevitably to imply ontological priority. It is not clear what the nature of this 'difference' is. Nor is it clear that Pannenberg offers an explanation of the priority of the Father in the divine life that precludes the tendency toward subordinationism for which he faults the traditional explanation.

In the next chapter I will suggest that these tensions in Pannenberg's trinitarian theology belie still deeper questions concerning his project. As noted previously, in his account of the character of the monarchy of the Father, Pannenberg refuses to distinguish between the lordship of God over creation and the Fatherhood of God in the eternal relations of the Trinity. Indeed, his principle that God's deity is his rule prevents him from making such a distinction. However, is God's lordship over creation,

expressed through the Son and Spirit, to be taken as entirely definitive of the intra-divine relations, as Pannenberg suggests? Is the direct correspondence which Pannenberg posits between the actions of the economic Trinity and the ontology of the immanent Trinity an acceptable interpretation of Rahner's axiom, or is a more subtle approach needed? This question is best addressed in the context of the next chapter's comparison of Pannenberg and Augustine.

Chapter 4

An Assessment of Pannenberg's Proposed Revision

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to assess critically Pannenberg's revision of the traditional concept of trinitarian relations of origin in light of the argument of the first four books of Augustine's The Trinity. The first section of this chapter presents Augustine's carefully argued attempt in these early books to resolve the problem of subordinationism. The chapter's second section demonstrates the usefulness of Augustine's trinitarian thought as basis for a critique of Pannenberg's revision on several levels. The following summary statements (to be taken up in the second section) serve as a preliminary guide to matters of relevance in the delineation of Augustine's argument:

(1) A careful examination of Augustine's argument suggests that Pannenberg (together with many other modern interpreters) underestimates the significance of the Nicene conception of relations of origin for Augustine's trinitarian doctrine. In the first chapter, I noted that Pannenberg contrasted the Nicene account of the unity of God (the Son and Spirit originate from Father as the fount of divinity), with Augustine's quite different account. Augustine's conception of the divine unity, as Pannenberg

sees it, set trinitarian theology on a path that leads to modalism. It seems to me, however, that Pannenberg does not accurately identify Augustine's stance. To review, Pannenberg contends that Augustine accounts for the unity of the trinitarian persons

> by insisting on the unity of the divine substance prior to all trinitarian differentiation and by defining this unity in such a way as to rule out any idea of substantial distinction even at the cost of making the differentiation of the three persons in God an impenetrable secret.[1]

Pannenberg elsewhere goes so far as to assert that "Augustine so strongly emphasized the unity of God that strictly no space was left for the trinity of persons."[2] Pannenberg thus seems to be charging Augustine's trinitarian doctrine with modalism. As well, Pannenberg's interpretation suggests that Augustine posits a shared divine substance as the substratum of deity, in contrast with the Nicene conception of the Father as the fount of deity. An examination of the first four books of The Trinity demonstrates the inaccuracy of Pannenberg's assessment of Augustine.

(2) The third chapter's discussion questioned whether Pannenberg's refutation of the biblical basis of the notion of relations of origin adequately reflected the procedure followed in patristic theology. Augustine's argument,

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[1] Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 283.

[2] ibid., 287.

however, indicates that, for him at least, the biblical basis for a concept of trinitarian relations of origin is not to be found primarily in the terminology of "begetting" and "breathing", though this language is employed, but in the simple biblical fact that the Son and Spirit are sent into the world, whereas the Father is not. Augustine's thought is thus relevant to Pannenberg's criticism that the traditional view lacks exegetical support.

(3) Augustine's attempt to resolve the problem of subordinationism (an attempt which Pannenberg nowhere acknowledges), differs markedly from Pannenberg's procedure. Each thinker detects the same problem: that the dependence of the Son and Spirit on the Father in an ontological sense seems to imply their inferiority. The idea of origination within God, therefore, seems to contradict the principle of the equality of the trinitarian persons. Augustine's treatment of this question bears on Pannenberg's criticism that the notion of relations of origin is not logically consistent.

(4) The irreducible distinction between God and creation will be seen as fundamental to the interpretive procedure Augustine follows when he makes statements about the immanent Trinity on the basis of the work of the trinitarian *persons* in the economy. Pannenberg operates with a quite different conception of the God-world relation, and so has a different understanding of the relationship between

the economic and the immanent Trinity. A comparison of the two views on this point suggests that Pannenberg's revised conception of the trinitarian relations demonstrates the limitations of his view of transcendence.

Following a presentation of Augustine's argument, discussion of each of these areas supports the twofold contention of this thesis: first, that the classical view of trinitarian relations of origin is not necessarily subject to the weaknesses Pannenberg suggests, and secondly, that Pannenberg's critique of the traditional conception exhibits flaws that derive from his misconstrual of the patristic materials and from ambiguity in his concept of transcendence.

I. The Argument of Books I-IV of The Trinity

In books I-IV Augustine is concerned to address the tendency toward subordinationism latent in the preceding tradition of trinitarian thought. Augustine's goal partially explains the particular emphasis within his account of the unity and equality of the divine persons.

Augustine generally regards his trinitarian reflections as being in line with preceding developments accepted by the church. In his introductory comments to The Trinity, he writes

> [t]he purpose of all the Catholic commentators I have been able to read on the divine books of both testaments, who have written before me on the trinity which God is, has been to teach that according to the

> scriptures Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity...[3]

In his own estimation at least, Augustine's starting point for trinitarian reflection derives from scripture and tradition, not from a philosophical conception of divine substance, however much he might employ the latter category. According to Eugene Teselle, Augustine became acquainted with the writings of the Cappadocians in 413, and from that time on incorporated their concept of relations into his trinitarian thought.[4] Although specific links would need to be established individually, it is reasonable to assume in a general sense that Augustine included the Cappadocians among the "Catholic commentators" he follows.

However, the above passage also hints at a change in perspective from that of the Nicene theologians. Language such as "Father and Son and Holy Spirit in the inseparable equality of one substance present a divine unity" suggests a shift in perspective from a central focus on the Father to a fuller conception of God as Trinity. This becomes further evident in sections 9-13 of book I. There, Augustine's arguments are directed toward establishing the equality and unity of the divine persons. Several biblical texts are taken to refer not to God the Father, as previous

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[3] Saint Augustine, The Trinity, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), I.7.

[4] Eugene TeSelle, Augustine the Theologian (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 294.

interpretations had done, but to God as Trinity. For example, Augustine comments on 1 Timothy 6:16:

> the apostle Paul's words *who alone has immortality* do not refer to the Father alone but to the one and only God which the Trinity is. For life everlasting can scarcely be mortal and subject to change, and thus the Son of God, being life everlasting, must also be meant with the Father by the words *who alone has immortality*.[5]

Augustine maintains that this text refers not only to the Son, but also to the Spirit, who is "also true God... absolutely equal to the Father and the Son, and consubstantial and co-eternal in the oneness of the three."[6] The cumulative effect of the many examples of this kind of exegesis suggests a clear emphasis on the unity and equality of the divine persons. And it is developments such as this that lead to the above-mentioned change in perspective - that Augustine operates with a conception of the Trinity in unity that is in some sense distinct from the Nicene tradition.

However, it is not immediately obvious whether the contrast is one of emphasis or of material content. One could regard Augustine's approach as a change simply in point of view - that his appropriation of previous theological reflection leads naturally to a synthesis, such that the triunity of God rather than Fatherhood becomes the

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[5] The Trinity, I.10. See Hill's note on previous interpretations of this text (I.10 n.26).

[6] ibid., I.13.

point of departure for further thought. As seen above, however, Pannenberg contends that Augustine has introduced material alterations into trinitarian understanding by positing a different basis for the divine unity. The issue can be clarified only in light of further delineation of Augustine's arguments on the question of subordinationism.

Augustine's treatment of subordinationism involves a complex argument which threads through the first four books of The Trinity. He introduces the problem when he writes

> many things are said in the holy books to suggest, or even to state openly that the Father is greater than the Son. This has misled people who are careless about examining or keeping in view the whole range of scriptures, and they have tried to transfer what is said of Jesus Christ as a man to that substance of his which was [eternal] before the incarnation and is [eternal] still.[7]

This passage warrants close examination. By referring to people being misled by biblical statements, Augustine is identifying the difficulty as a hermeneutical problem. His first step to address the problem, therefore, will be to establish appropriate rules of interpretation. Moreover, Augustine identifies the specific error as transferring statements about the incarnate Christ to the eternal substance of God. The underlying problem here is a misunderstanding of the relationship between God's action in creation and God's being in himself. Augustine will maintain that while it is true that God uses created reality to

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[7] ibid., I.14.

reveal eternal truth, a sharp distinction between the created order and the divine substance cannot be compromised. Indeed, the irreducible distinction between God and creation means that manifestations of divine reality in creation are inevitably limited. God truly discloses himself through created means, but the means of disclosure cannot fully contain the reality revealed, for creation cannot perfectly enclose eternal reality.

As noted, Augustine discerns the root of the problem of subordinationism in the interpretation of biblical texts. He observes that the problem arises because numerous scriptural statements seem to suggest that the Son is less than the Father. Augustine deals with much of this biblical material by constructing rules for interpretation framed in the language of Philippians 2:6-7. Texts that speak of the Son's divinity and equality with the Father refer to Christ in the 'form of God'. Texts which imply his humanity and inferiority refer to his incarnate status in the 'form of a servant'. The interpreter who is properly acquainted with these rules will not be troubled by apparent contradictions, but will be attuned to the "two resonances" in the scriptures, which correspond to the divine and human natures of Christ.[8]

These rules alone are not adequate, however, for there remain biblical statements which require a different

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[8] ibid., I.22.

approach. For example, statements such as John 5:26 - "as the Father has life in himself, so he also gave the Son to have life in himself"[9] - apply not to the Son's equality with the Father, or to the incarnate Son's lesser status, but to the divine relations of origin. That is to say, the dependence on the Father which certain statements ascribe to the Son have their basis in the Son's ontological origin as begotten of the Father. Augustine explains that

> the reason for these statements can only be that the life of the Son is unchanging like the Father's, and yet is from the Father; and that the work of Father and Son is indivisible, and yet the Son's working is from the Father just as he himself is from the Father.[10]

Augustine is quick to add that the Son's origin from the Father "does not imply any dearth of equality, but only his birth in eternity".[11] For Augustine, it is crucial to recognize that these biblical statements do not directly pertain to the *equality* of the divine persons (previously established in I.7-13), but to the *character* of the intra-divine relations. This rule for interpretation, that some statements refer to the Son being 'from the Father', is therefore not in conflict with the rule that some statements refer to the Son in the 'form of God'. However, the relationship between these rules is the very point Augustine

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[9] ibid., I.26; II.3.

[10] ibid., II.3.

[11] ibid., II.3.

is seeking to establish, and so this notion requires clarification from a different angle.

These rules must be applied in coordination with another, more basic, hermeneutical axiom Augustine employs, which has to do with the relationship of signs and meanings. The role of signs is to point beyond themselves to the meanings they signify.[12] Signs give one access to meanings, but meanings in a sense lie beyond the sign, and meanings cannot be reduced to an explicit description of a sign. A fundamental hermeneutical error is to confuse signs and meanings by focusing on the sign itself, not letting one's attention move beyond the sign to the meaning signified.[13]

The theological significance of this principle for Augustine is that creation, and especially God's actions in the economy of salvation, are pointers to God himself. He writes "God produces visible and sensible effects as he pleases in sky and earth, sea and air, to signify and show himself as he knows best".[14] Indeed, biblical revelation and created reality offer complementary signs of the reality of God.

> I will not be idle in seeking out the substance of God, whether through his scriptures or his creatures. For both of these are offered us for our observation

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[12] Augustine outlines this principle in On Christian Doctrine, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr., (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 2.1.

[13] ibid., 3.9-13.

[14] The Trinity, III.10.

> and scrutiny in order that in them he may be sought, he may be loved, who inspired the one and created the other.[15]

As his argument unfolds, the categories of sign/meaning and creation/Creator will prove to provide Augustine with the hermeneutical key to resolve the problem of subordinationism.

With the aforementioned principles in mind, Augustine is in a position to consider the main biblical concept at the root of subordinationism. This is the relationship between the sending of the Son and the Spirit (the divine missions), and the intra-divine relations (the divine processions). This problem has two aspects. First, it is universally accepted that "'[t]he one who sends is greater that the one sent'".[16] And, according to the New Testament, the Son was sent into the world from the Father (John 16:28). A conflation of these ideas - a general notion of the superiority of the sender and the sending of the Son - would suggest that the Son is in a fundamental sense less than the Father.

Secondly, the problem is compounded by the widespread notion that in the Old Testament era the Son mediated the relationship between the invisible Father and the world. Augustine refers to this type of thinking when he writes that

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[15] ibid., II.1.

[16] ibid., II.7.

> [some] say that the Son is visible not merely in the flesh which he took of the virgin, but even before that in himself. For it is he, they say, who showed himself visibly to the fathers.[17]

Although Augustine dismisses this position in II.15-16 as a crude confusing of spiritual and material reality, the tendency to read the Son's mission into God's actions in the world prior to the incarnation remains a matter in need of clarification.[18] A notion of pre-incarnate missions of the Son may be taken to suggest that he is the principle by which God relates to creation, and is thus of a lower order that the Father. The problem, therefore, is how to correct this twofold misunderstanding of the mission of the Son.

As a preliminary concern, before entering fully into the discussion of significance of the 'sendings' of Son and Spirit, Augustine makes two important observations from the biblical text. First, he recalls his admonition to "examine the whole range of scriptures."[19] He notes that texts such as John 1:10 ("He was in the world and the world was made through him") and Psalm 139:7 ("Where shall I withdraw from your Spirit") indicate that both the Son and the Spirit were present to creation prior to their respective missions.[20] Augustine therefore asks,

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[17] ibid., II.15.

[18] Cf. IV.25.

[19] ibid., I.14. See On Christian Doctrine, 2.14.

[20] ibid., II.7.

> [i]f then both Son and Holy Spirit are sent to where they already are, the question arises what can really be meant by this sending of the Son or of the Holy Spirit - the Father alone is nowhere said to have been sent.[21]

The full answer to this question awaits the conclusion of book IV. But the present point is that if the Son and Spirit are sent to where they already are, then the sendings must not be conceived in a way that literally corresponds with our normal ideas of sending. The all encompassing presence of the whole Trinity undermines a literal, spatial notion of what is meant for the Son and Spirit to be sent. The sendings (or missions) are a change in the kind of presence God exhibits toward/in creation.

A second, related preliminary point is that Father, Son and Spirit all share in the sending of the Son. The unity of will is such that the event of the Word becoming flesh arises from the harmonious action of the three. Therefore the common sense notion, that the one who sends is greater than the one who is sent, does not apply to the divine missions, where 'sender' and 'one sent' are one. It would thus be wrong, in Augustine's view, to ascribe subordinate status to the second and third trinitarian persons on the basis of either spatial or hierarchical notions of 'sending'. These conceptual categories drawn from mutable creation are inadequate to convey the full significance of divine reality.

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[21] ibid., II.8.

The implication of these initial observations is that created signs are both useful and limited in conveying divine truth. In general, the ambiguous nature of signs means that one sign may have multiple connotations. Specifically, in connection with the present argument, created signs that point to eternal reality connote both material and immutable realities, and the interpreter's burden is to distinguish between the two. As the discussion proceeds, Augustine will return again to this idea when he identifies distinctions and relations between God's eternal being and God's relationship with creation.

Bearing in mind these preliminary thoughts, Augustine approaches the problem which subordinationism poses for a conception of intra-divine equality and unity more directly. He divides the topic into three questions. The first question is dealt with in II.14-35: Which divine person(s) are manifested in Old Testament revelation? Augustine concludes that in any given manifestation any of the persons (as the context indicates) or the whole Trinity (most likely) might be represented. This suggests that the missions in the Old Testament must be distinct from the missions in New Testament, since the former manifestations represent the whole Trinity, while the latter manifestations of the incarnation and pentecost are directly associated with the Son and Spirit. This raises the question of how the pre-incarnation missions did occur, if that era was

characterized by manifestations of the whole Trinity.

The way in which Augustine poses the second question seems, on the surface, peculiar. In III.4-27 he asks whether God caused the manifestations recounted in the Old Testament directly or through angelic mediation. After examining numerous texts, Augustine concludes that the relationship of God to the world prior to the incarnation and pentecost was mediated by angels.[22] The obvious question, of course, is how a notion of angelic mediation serves his overall argument. The point is this: by extending the biblical account of angels into a full-orbed notion of angelic mediation, Augustine provides a concrete basis to distinguish between Old Testament and New Testament missions, thus further establishing the uniqueness of incarnation and pentecost. This conclusion allows Augustine to view the sending of the Son solely with reference to the incarnation, not with reference to supposed pre-incarnation missions. In this way he moves away from the problematic notion that Son's identity is defined as a principle through which God relates to creation.

The issue of the significance of the incarnation leads to Augustine's third question. If in the pre-incarnation era God revealed himself to creation through angels, who employed created means to communicate to human beings, and if in the New Testament era God revealed himself through the

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[22] ibid., III.26.

incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit, also employing created means, what is the difference between these manifestations?

En route to his conclusion, Augustine discusses at length the significance of the incarnation. He argues that the incarnation of the Son makes eternal truth accessible in a way not possible in pagan philosophy.[23] Pagan philosophers truly perceived the human longing for eternity, yet the moral dimension of realizing this quest was not properly grasped. In the incarnation of the Son, however, eternity penetrates creation in an unprecedented way, inaugurating for humanity an unprecedented form of access to God. The moral problem that separates corrupt humanity from the incorruptible God is overcome, for the work of Christ offers purity to impure humanity. And the chasm between mutable creation and immutable truth is overcome, for eternal truth and mutable creation are profoundly mingled in the incarnate Son. And, through the incarnate Son, God can be truly known, for sign (the incarnate Son) and meaning (the eternal God) are one.[24]

It is in this light that the manifestations of God prior to the incarnation must be understood. Augustine concludes:

Everything that has taken place in time in

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[23] ibid., IV.24.

[24] ibid., IV.24.

> 'originated' matters which have been produced from the eternal and reduced back into the eternal, and has been designed to elicit the faith we must be purified by in order to contemplate the truth, has either been testimony to this mission or has been the actual mission of the Son of God.[25]

The testimony/actual mission distinction allows Augustine finally to detach trinitarian speculation from a mistaken, subordinationist understanding of the Son's activity in creation, while at the same time acknowledging that the Son was somehow present in Hebrew tradition and pagan culture. All things, whether in the Old Testament tradition (Book III) or pagan culture (Book IV), bear witness to Christ, in whose incarnation eternal truth and mutable creation are united for the benefit of humanity. One could go further and say that all things therefore bear witness to the trinitarian character of God, for this, supremely, is what the incarnation signifies.

With this meditation on the incarnation in the foreground, Augustine draws his argument to a close. The profound intersection of eternal and created realities present in the incarnate Son must not, Augustine maintains, lead us to compromise the distinction between these realities. It is true that in the incarnation 'sign' and 'meaning' are one. But the irreducible distinction between God and creation means that the sending of the Son has double significance. On the one hand, being sent requires

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[25] ibid., IV.25.

that he take on lesser status. But this signifies humanity's weakness, not the eternal Son's inferiority. The connotation of inferiority suggested by the incarnation derives from the Son's humble involvement in creation, not from a disparity of equality in the triune life. On the other hand, the sending of the Son, and the giving of the Spirit, signify the character of God's eternal being. Augustine declares that the incarnation of the Son and the giving of the Spirit "bring home to us that the Father is the source and origin of deity".[26]

Conversely, the reason that the missions of the Son and Spirit reveal the nature of the intra-divine relations is that the trinitarian relations of origin are the antecedent in eternity of the activity of God in the economy of salvation. The begetting of the Son is the reality within the intra-divine relations that is antecedent to the sending of the Son: "he was not sent in virtue of some disparity of power or substance or anything in him that is not equal to the Father, but in virtue of being from the Father...".[27] Moreover, Augustine argues that the Spirit's nature as the gift of God indicates the Spirit's eternal procession from the Father.[28] And further, although the interrelationship between the Son and Spirit's respective processions from the

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[26] ibid., IV.32.

[27] ibid., IV.27.

[28] ibid., IV.29.

Father raises complex questions for Augustine, one of his clearest assertions on this topic pertains directly to the present discussion. Whatever role the Son has in the giving of the Spirit, in Augustine's view the Father ultimately has priority. Jesus' statement about the Spirit in John 15:26, "whom I will send from the Father", indicates

> that the source of all godhead, or if you prefer it, of all deity, is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son was born.[29]

II. Critical Assessment

How does Pannenberg's proposed revision of the traditional notion of relations of origin compare with Augustine's nuanced treatment of the problem of subordinationism? The discussion here picks up from the summary statements made at the beginning of the chapter. There are four areas to consider.

1. Augustine a Modalist?

First, I suggested in chapter one that the extreme brevity and interpretive agenda of Pannenberg's overview of historical trinitarian theology allows for neither thoroughness nor accuracy. Pannenberg's interpretation of Augustine illustrates this point. The above delineation of Augustine's argument strongly suggests that he fully integrated the Nicene concept of relations of origin into

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[29] ibid., IV.29.

his trinitarian doctrine. Pannenberg's characterization of Augustine - that he exchanges the Nicene conception of the Father as fount of divinity for a conception of divine substance as the underlying substratum - does not reflect the content of Augustine's trinitarian thought as presented here. The central importance for Augustine of the trinitarian relations of origin, as revealed in the economy of salvation, indicates that the intra-divine distinctions and relations are fully theologically integrated into his early discussion in The Trinity. Augustine's treatment of the problem of subordinationism in books I-IV does not undermine the importance of this central trinitarian conception.

It would be of great interest to pursue in detail the question of whether Augustine remains true to his insights in books I-IV throughout the treatise. If such a study were carried out, it would need to proceed in light of Augustine's reflections on the trinitarian relations of origin, and the unity of the divine substance, as two unconflicting, and non-negotiable conceptions of God.

2. The Biblical Basis of the Concept of Trinitarian Relations of Origin

As noted in the third chapter, Pannenberg contends that the idea of relations of origin is indefensible by the

standards of modern exegesis. The biblical language of "begetting" and "breathing", he contends, should not be taken to denote eternal processions within God, as traditional theology has done. Rather, these biblical words simply denote trinitarian actions in the economy of salvation.

In the first four books of Augustine's The Trinity, however, the biblical basis for the idea of relations of origin does not rest on interpretations of individual texts, but rather on the sending of the Son (incarnation) and the giving of the Spirit (pentecost). For Augustine, the 'missions' of the Son and Spirit reveal the eternal 'processions' within God. Pannenberg asserts that traditional theology has drawn a sharp distinction between the missions in the economy and the processions within God. This view does not, however, give an adequate account of the classical view of the relationship between missions and processions. The main point in traditional theology, as Augustine's argument suggests, is not simply that the processions are *distinct from* the missions. Rather, the processions are *antecedent to* the divine missions, and the missions in time reveal the processions in eternity. Walter Kasper explains,

> [t]he mission presupposes and has for its origin the eternal dependence of the Son on the Father and of the Spirit on the Father and the Son. The Son is eternally from the Father; the Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son. The mission in time thus presupposes the eternal procession and adds to it a

> new, historical mode of presence in the created world.[30]

In Kasper's account, the fact that only the Son and Spirit enter the world as the mode of God's presence has its basis in their eternal movement from the Father. The incarnation and pentecost, movements from eternity to time, have their basis in eternal movements within the divine life.

It needs to be stated with Kasper and against Pannenberg that the classical procedure for discerning the nature of the divine processions has its basis not in individual biblical texts, but, as Augustine demonstrates, in an interpretation of the divine missions. The basis for the concept of relations of origin is simply the biblical idea that the Son and Spirit are sent into the world, and the Father does not likewise enter history. A significant implication here is that the point of departure for the traditional doctrine is a biblical theme (the missions of the Son and Spirit) that can be discerned even through Pannenberg's application of the historical-critical method. The notion of the divine processions does not need to presuppose a view of scripture as inspired text, nor need this notion be derived from the biblical language of begetting and breathing.

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[30] Kasper, 278.

3. Augustine and Pannenberg on Subordinationism

Ultimately, whereas Pannenberg attempts to resolve the problem of subordinationism by revising the classical concept of divine relations, Augustine attempts to resolve the problem by analysing how one forms conceptions of the divine relations. Pannenberg interprets the problem as an inadequate doctrine of God. Augustine interprets the problem as an inadequate method of formulating a doctrine of God.

In following a hermeneutical procedure for discerning the nature of the immanent trinitarian relations, it is crucial for Augustine that interpreters refrain from conflating what the missions signify about the weakness of creation, on one side, and the eternal nature of God, on the other. In Augustine's view earlier trinitarian reflection failed to comprehend the full significance of these signs by projecting the weakness of mutable creation onto the immutable Trinity, thereby wrongly introducing categories such as inferiority/superiority into the divine life.

This criticism applies to Pannenberg. Pannenberg's principle that God's deity is God's rule is a conflation of God's being in himself and God's relation to creation that, for Augustine, would fail to maintain a proper distinction between God and the world. The trinitarian relations of "entrusting-depending", "receiving-realizing" and "responding-establishing" each evidence the sort of

confusion Augustine takes pains to prevent. From the perspective of Augustine's trinitarian thought, Pannenberg's refusal to distinguish between the lordship of God over creation and the Fatherhood of God in the eternal Trinity derives from an inadequate view of the distinction between God and creation. At a minimum, this point reveals the difference between Pannenberg's approach and the classical procedure.

4. The Relationship between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity

Augustine's carefully constructed hermeneutical procedure bears particularly on the principle of the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity. Pannenberg's interpretation of this principle leads him directly to equate each economic "active relation" between the trinitarian persons with the eternal relations. Pannenberg thus seeks to *define* the intra-divine relations on the basis of the active relations between the persons in the economy of salvation. Augustine's procedure likewise assumes that God's revelation in the economy is the path to understanding God's eternal character, but Augustine's interpretive procedure differs in an important way. For Augustine, the actions in the economy *signify* the eternal relations. The procedure for interpreting the significance of trinitarian actions in the economy is more complex than interpreting the economic Trinity as a definition of the immanent Trinity.

Most importantly, trinitarian signification needs to be interpreted in view of the irreducible difference between God and the world.

If, on the one hand, Pannenberg holds to the view that God truly transcends the world - that God in his nature is free from the limitations of creation - then a procedure such as Augustine's is certainly admissible, even required. The need to discern between what the actions of God in the economy signify concerning the created order, on one side, and the eternal character of God, on the other, is plain. This would seem to suggest that even within the rationalistic methodology Pannenberg adopts, Augustine's solution to the problem of subordinationism provides a coherent answer to the logical problem of the apparent conflict between the equality of the persons and the origination of the second and third person from the first.

If, on the other hand, Pannenberg's concept of transcendence is undermined by the idea that the immanent Trinity achieves its existence only eschatologically, then Augustine's procedure does not apply. However, if this is so, the very idea of an "immanent Trinity" would seem to lose all significance in Pannenberg's doctrine of God, although he refrains from drawing this conclusion. Pannenberg's procedure appears to leave him unable to say anything about God in himself, apart from God's relation to the world, although he retains a theological vocabulary

(i.e. "immanent"/"economic" Trinity) that implies such a distinction. Augustine, in contrast, believes that such knowledge of God in his eternal being has been given in God's revelation in the economy of salvation. In light of this knowledge, trinitarian theology must maintain the unity of, without compromising the distinction between, God-revealed and God-in-eternity.

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