
***Systematic Theology*. Volume 2. By Wolfhart Pannenberg. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994. ISBN 0-8028-3707-7. Pp. xvi+499.**

The English-speaking world is once again indebted to Geoffrey Bromiley and Eerdmans Publishing Company for making available the now long-awaited second volume of Pannenberg's projected three-volume *Systematic Theology* (the German original appeared in 1991). Those familiar with and appreciative of the first volume (1988; ET 1991) will not be disappointed by this second installment. Pannenberg's ability to integrate great themes of science and philosophy into a theology of outstanding historical sensitivity is difficult to match. Given its methodology, which tends to be inordinately encyclopedic, it is unlikely that this series will strike a popular chord—an unfortunate pretext for staunch conservatives to continue claiming Pannenberg as their own.

The major themes covered in this volume are predominantly cosmological (chapter 7) and anthropological (chapters 8–11). Pannenberg resumes the Barthian practice of placing the doctrine of the Trinity at the basis (beginning) of theological reflection, which he believes ought to serve as the norm for properly Christian dogmatics in lieu of the semi-heretical, non-revelational one God (cf. vol. I, 280ff.). An important, if not all-encompassing, hermeneutical principle of the work will be referred to here acronymically as SDP, "the self-distinction principle," which indicates the harmony that is believed to reside in the immanent and economic life of the Trinity. The obvious relation of SDP to anthropology will be discussed below.

The paradigmatic source of self-distinction is found, for Pannenberg, in the self-emptying (*kenôsis*) of God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who manifests historically the eternal dynamic of self-distinction from God the Father (22ff.). This he understands to be "the basis of all creaturely existence in its distinction from God, and therefore...the basis of the human existence of Jesus" (377; cf. 63).

Naturally, then, Pannenberg grounds both the act and the evolution of creation in the sustaining activity of the Son (Logos) in his self-distinction from the Father. He borrows from physics the notion of "field" (pioneered in theology by Thomas F. Torrance) as an appropriate alternative to Origen's subjectivist (!) *nous*, in order to explain the generative activity of the Spirit (*pneuma*). However, the Spirit alone is not understood as the field, "but as a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality" in self-distinction from both Father and Son (83). Pannenberg upholds the *filioque* clause, removing it from the context of trinitarian relations of "origin," which he feels contributes to the excessive reaction of the East against the West (cf. vol. I, 317ff.).

Pannenberg's anthropological turn also draws its sustenance from SDP, which he unfolds in line with general concepts of tension, namely "dignity" and "misery." The dignity *par excellence* of humanity resides in its being inextinguishably destined for fellowship with God. For its definitive realization, Pannenberg

points to the incarnation of the Son, in whom the *imago Dei* comes to perfect (original) expression, and of which we are a copy. A peculiar version of "self-transcendence"—inspired by Descartes' rationalist premise that the idea of the infinite is the condition for the apprehension of all things finite (229; cf. vol. I, 113ff.)—is Pannenberg's answer to attaining to our destiny. Only by accepting our finitude can we achieve such an end. "In other words, we must be fashioned into the image of the Son, of his self-distinction from the Father" (230). Its corollary, misery (a term he prefers to "sin"), refers to the intrusion of alienating tendencies (*Entfremdung*) which separate us from fellowship with God. Death, which Pannenberg interprets extraneously, is its ultimate pronouncement: not as a necessary condition of our finitude, since Christian hope holds to an eschatological mode of *finite* existence without death, but as a result of a pre-human "demonic dynamic" that culminates in the dominion of sin and death over humanity (274), a powerful theodicean story with which most of us are familiar.

In the remaining chapters, Pannenberg develops his christology "from below" in light of the general anthropological thrust of earlier segments. He concludes with a final reflection on God's reconciliatory activity through the special humanity and death of Jesus, whose unity with God in all its aspects was confirmed historically by the Easter event. (Pannenberg, I dare say, is one of the few theologians today capable of making "resurrection ontology" intellectually respectable.) Of central importance again is SDP. That Jesus proclaimed the coming kingdom of the Father and not any dignity of his own (Mark 10:18 par.; John 5:19; 14:28); that he subordinated himself to the rule of God to the point of death, in scrupulous observance of one of his difficult sayings (Mark 8:35 pars.), indirectly support the identity of the human personality of Jesus with the self-emptying Son of God. Yet, according to Pannenberg, this identity could not have been known by Jesus from the outset of his ministry, let alone at his birth. The mutual *perichoresis* (indwelling or interpenetration) of the natures is mediated by the relation and self-subordination of Jesus to the Father, "the condition of the manifestation of the Son in him" (387). It is an affiliation determined in the self-yielding process of the historical Jesus—ultimately, in the *Via Crucis* (cf. Hebrews 5:7–9).

Pannenberg focuses salvation on the eschatological future of God—a distinctively "objectivist" conviction which has earned him great notoriety. By doing so, he intends to thwart the overwhelmingly real yet "fallen" propensity to limit all human achievement and self-fulfillment to this world alone. Aware that the biblical witnesses vary on the theme of *sôtêria*, Pannenberg ascribes to theology the synthesizing task of "connection," which he relates functionally to two suppositions: (1) the future of God is proleptically present in Jesus Christ, although its consummation is still ahead; and (2) participation in salvation is mediated through the history of Jesus, especially his crucifixion (402f.). The second point is then taken up in a discussion of the Pauline notion of reconciliation. In short, reconciliation, necessitated by an opposition to God into which sin and death has plunged us, took place once and for all in the vicarious expiation of Jesus' crucifixion.

Pannenberg, by appealing to the continuum of history, guards against the

Feuerbachian retort that this and other articles of faith are merely subjective transference. This is supposed to exonerate the nature of faith as always being open to question. Furthermore, he cautiously appeals to the second law of thermodynamics, which lends cosmological credibility to the claim that the *eschaton* will finally decide the truth of what is now held reasonably, though not definitively, in faith (443; cf. 146–61). This is a vital facet of his theology to be developed more fully in volume three.

There is really no question that Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, hardly done justice here, is a work of sheer brilliance. Rarely does one find such a remarkable blend of careful scholarship and unwavering religious conviction. Nothing is said hastily, nor are ideational correlations made abruptly so as to suggest the superfluity of further research and verification. Pannenberg's traditionalism is thoroughly modern. No nook or cranny of historical-theological investigation escapes his notice.

Nevertheless, there are limitations. Pannenberg's accentuation of an out-there-future-definitive-truth, while attempting to escape subjectivism, manifests signs of being caught up in the very throe of its well-known aporia: what is really true must not be confused with the proleptic appearance of truth held "subjectively" in faith *hic et nunc*—even though they are intricately related. Pannenberg believes that "the really real" (*das Ding-an-sich*) can/will be known, though only, as it were, from the outside, in the future of God. And yet in this effort to secure the objectivity of truth, Pannenberg displays an unwitting reliance on a sophisticated intuitionism that understands truth to be the unmediated (though thematized) thing which presents itself to the awareness of the merely systematizing mind (i.e., *Verstand-Vernunft*). In the words of an earlier publication, "Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before the eyes There is no need for any additional perfection of man..." (*Offenbarung als Geschichte*, 1961; ET 1968).

Instead of destroying the subject-object distinction, against which Pannenberg so vehemently labors, he sublates it at a higher, more complex level. In order to escape this infamous split, it is not enough to posit an even more primordial awareness—"awareness of the infinite" as he calls it (196)—than that inherent in cognition. As Philip Clayton has rightly observed, some temporal "ontic structure" is missing from Pannenberg's analysis, which, if present, would lend a moment-to-moment credibility to his eschatological claim. Pannenberg's theological interpretation of "the feeling for life," as it now stands, does not really provide a convincing alternative to the subjective-objective impasse of modernity.

But what will doubtlessly appear even more disappointing to the average reader is Pannenberg's inattention (in this his *magnum opus*!) to feminist theologians. The exclusion seems intentional, since it is clear from other sources that he is well aware of feminist thought and how it challenges traditional trinitarian language—indeed, thinking itself as it is generally accepted in the West. This and other gaps in the text sadly confirm the cryptic remark of John B. Cobb, Jr. on the dust jacket of the first volume: Pannenberg's work is likely to prove "the greatest systematic theology of *his* generation" (emphasis added). While it is certainly fitting to compare his genius to that of Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, this reviewer

unhappily suspects that Pannenberg's contribution will not "fall like a bomb on the playground of the theologians."

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Christian Theology: An Introduction. By Alister E. McGrath. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994. ISBN 0-631160-78-7. Pp. xviii +510.

McGrath has given us a resource in Christian theology that is useful and instructive, both for the novice and for the seasoned theologian. The book is precisely what it presents itself to be: an introduction. The author presumes no prior knowledge of theology on the part of the reader.

The book is organized into three large sections. The first is historical, presenting as it were a panoramic vista of, identifying the most prominent peaks which have arisen in, the history of Christian thought. Individual theologians are introduced briefly and the content of their thought summarized carefully but concisely. The second section addresses the sources and methods of theology. The third presents the loci of theology in classic order. Contentious issues are presented carefully, with the strength of each position argued sympathetically and criticisms identified exactly. Each chapter concludes with questions for review and discussion, noting significant names and concepts.

McGrath's volume is liberally sprinkled with citations from classical and contemporary sources. One wishes, however, that he would provide us with the sources of those citations. Granting that an introductory work such as this may better serve its readers without the clutter of scholarly apparatus, one may wish nonetheless to refer to an edition of Augustine or Schleiermacher or MacQuarrie in order to engage the larger context of the point so deftly summarized; with few sources located, one is left to more serendipitous recovery of the origin of the citation.

Only occasionally does one find a factual error. Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* (1952), for instance, is not a volume of sermons, but the Terry Lectures delivered at Yale in 1950, in which Tillich sought to explain his appropriation of depth psychology as an alternative to political socialism as a vehicle which might be placed in service of existential theology for the transformation of culture. This may be a moot point that does not affect McGrath's argument. However, one appreciates McGrath as a theologian from whom one has come to expect exactness and precision, and one is rather surprised to find him missing the slightest turn.

More troublesome to this reader is the want in this volume, as so often in McGrath's theology, of a sense of the theologian as wrestler. McGrath's knowledge and presentation is encyclopedic. But there is a dispassionate quality to his writing that leaves one wondering what McGrath himself cares about, worries about, wonders about, or finds mysterious or troublesome. In his discussion of