

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Volume I. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. xiii + 473 pp. \$39.95.

Systematic Theology, volume I, introduces us to the discussion of epistemological and ontological prolegomena of what promises to be a broad and explicit formulation of Pannenberg's postmodern version of Christian theology. Epistemological loci such as truth (chap. 1), natural theology (chap. 2), religious experience (chap. 4), and revelation (chap. 5), are examined first. In the final chapter (6), where the Trinity, divine essence, and attributes are discussed, Pannenberg explains the ontological foundations of his system.

The concept of special revelation is replaced by natural theology, which, under the "revelation as history" designation, has been broadened to include not only nature but also general human history. General human history becomes salvation history (59). "The world, humanity, and history," which Pannenberg sees as expressions "of the deity of God" (59), are, then, the sources of theology. The sources of theology (revelation), however, cannot a priori guarantee the truth of theology (48). Achievement of theological truth requires an a posteriori process of scientific verification (50).

Pannenberg tries to overcome Barth's and Schleiermacher's limitations by suggesting that the truth in religious experience requires the metaphysical idea of God as infinite being (175). As Pannenberg argues for a metaphysical ground of religious experience, the postmodernity of his approach becomes apparent. Briefly put, according to Pannenberg, the truth of religious experience assumes divine revelation understood as "self-demonstration of God in the process of historical experience" (171), and God's revelation requires an understanding of God's being.

Pannenberg's doctrine of God as Trinity becomes both the structure of his *Systematic Theology* and the climax of his theological prolegomena (59). Theology as a whole coincides with the actual development of the doctrine of the Trinity (335) in "creation, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology" (335). Only the completion of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, then, will bring his conception of God and the Trinity into full expression and vice versa.

The persons of the eternal, immanent Trinity are "concretions" (430) of the divine essence (Spirit), which Pannenberg understands in analogy to "Michael Faraday's idea of universal force field" (383). Pannenberg's systematical construction reaches its decisive point as the relationship between the immanent and economic trinity is formulated in connection to two pivotal axes, namely, God's eternity and His activity. Departing from Plato's eternity-time antithesis, Pannenberg follows Plotinus' suggestion that God's eternity should be understood as "the presence of the totality of life" in a simultaneous, undivided, perfect whole (403). God's action is to be

understood as His "self-actualization" in creation (386)—that is to say, as "a repetition or reiteration of his eternal deity in his relation to the world" (389). Through the Son the deity comes forth from His Godhead (430) as the basis of creation (421), revelation, and consummation, in encounter with its Creator (389).

The reiteration of the eternal trinitarian God, Who in Himself possesses the totality of life in the simultaneity of His eternity, provides the ontological ground for Pannenberg's concept of revelation as history. World and history are direct revelations of God because they are temporal duplications of His eternal life in time. By the same concept Pannenberg can bridge the Kantian epistemological gap. Since God reiterates Himself in time, humans can grasp God's revelation directly, albeit incompletely and under the category of anticipation.

Pannenberg's system rests on his concept of revelation as history which, in turn, depends on his conception of God's eternity and its trinitarian reiteration in historical time. The latter, however, is a hypothetical interpretation produced by Pannenberg's theological imagination without adequate scientific basis in historical revelation itself. Moreover, the hypothetical nature of his ontological basis determines the hypothetical nature of his concept of revelation as history, as well as that of his entire *Systematic Theology*. Failure to overcome both classical ontological ideas on ultimate reality and the Kantian interpretation of reason's limits prevents Pannenberg from discovering the way in which biblical epistemology and ontology are able not only to overcome classicism and kantism but also to uncover a complete system of theology. Pannenberg's system is built on the uncritical assumption that a biblical approach to systematic theology is irrelevant and outmoded.

Technical evaluation of Pannenberg's theological project and whether it involves trinitarian panentheism, however, will become possible only as his interpretation of creation, salvation, and consummation is unfolded. Meanwhile, volume I of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* seems to anticipate a consistent neoclassical theological program, which, by way of remarkable scholarship and a trinitarian structure, is able to integrate the historical and transcendent levels of reality as a whole, thus providing a convincing alternative to Process Theology.