Wolfhart Pannenberg: Comprehensive Notes from Systematic Theology

One of Pannenberg’s cardinal principles was that the parts are experienced now, and can provide a provisional knowledge but only make sense in light of the whole, of the end result. This is true of his book! You can pull out ideas along the way, but you can’t make sense of it until you read it all.

A. Historical Sketch

- Born 1928 in Stettin, Germany which now belongs to Poland
- Mid 1940s experienced a flood of light on the street that he described as ‘Jesus Christ claiming him as his own.’
- Mid 1940s encountered Friedrich Nietzsche’s work. It sparked an enduring interest in the deep issues of philosophy.
- ca 1946 had a teacher of literature who had been a part of the Confessing Church during the Third Reich convince him of the need for a closer look at Christianity
- 1948 studied in Göttigen under Nicolai Hartmann
- 1950 studied in Basel under Karl Jaspers (philosophy) and Karl Barth (theology)
- 1951 studied in Heidelberg; founded the ‘Pannenberg circle’ with Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff, Martin Elze, and Ulrich Wilkens in an effort to bridge the divide between theological specialties and produce “a unified comprehensive vision of theology.” Produced the volume Revelation as History in 1961 as a collection of essays and defined his essential stance.
- 1953 earned doctorate with a dissertation on the doctrine of predestination in Duns Scotus
- 1954 began to teach after receiving habilitation with book on the idea of analogy from early Greek philosophy to Thomas Aquinas
- 1958-61 professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran church seminary in Wuppertal
- 1961-1968 University of Mainz
- 1968-1993 University of Munich
- Died September, 2014.

B. Revelation as History

- “Revelation is an indirect self-disclosure of God in the course of historical events. … The Word of God declares what God has been doing in the actual sequence of events open to historical investigation” (Braaten, 641).
- Revelation is accessible to, and will stand up to the scrutiny, of investigation.
- A complete picture of God’s revelation can be found in the complete picture of history. This means
  (1) the past, present, and future are descriptive of God and only together can form the complete revelation. We have access to only a part. It also means
  (2) God’s revelation is not contained in any private, exclusive locations that are not given to regular historical investigation.
Notes from the Text

Forward

p. x. A scientific investigation of Christian doctrine must take into consideration the specific context of any given attempt to communicate the universal message. Theological method must take into account the historical situation wherein the revelation of Christ was received. This particular historical context forms a part of the whole that is God’s revelation of himself as the unfolding of history.

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

§1 Theology

p. 2-3. Pannenberg must address the question of the possibility of knowledge brought to a head under Karl Barth. He affirms that revelation has never been dispensed with but remains the source by which God makes possible, or offers, knowledge of himself. This over and against what many have taken from philosophically-informed Medieval theology to be the elevation of natural theology (Ritschl, Harnack, and Barth rejected theology as Hellenistic theology).

p. 3. The focus of theology is its object God or how God’s plan concerns humanity. Barth argued that we cannot know the human problem or the solution for humanity unless we view it through Christ’s historical revelation.


p. 5. Economic issues concern those human/earthly matters that are not about God directly, but his relation to them.

p. 6. The issue at stake is: from what source is a knowledge of God possible – is theology as the knowledge of God in himself possible (or can we know the inner working of the Trinity) outside of the activity of God among human beings? The answer, eventually, is that we must know God through revelation as the history of human beings and specifically in Christ through whom we access to even the immanent Trinity.

p. 8. Theology must be concerned to produce more than the results of textual and contextual analysis. It must presuppose that its subject is God and not merely the 8th-century prophet (or prophetic depiction) of God, for example. It must assume not only that something can be said about God but that a God exists about which something is being said. This is Pannenberg’s position over and against the history-of-religions school that arose after the Enlightenment critique of the trustworthiness of Scripture to depict objective events and the Liberal tradition’s tendency, after Schleiermacher, to locate truth in the individual. Pannenberg balances the study of religion with the notion that the content of religion is informed by an objective truth.

§2 The Truth of Dogma – Pannenberg describes how dogmatic truth has come to be true in Christian history.

p. 9 ¶ Attempts to balance the notion of objective source with subjective recipient.
11. Theological truth as a uniting law for some kind of (empire) community. Theological statements come to be truth because of the authority of the institutional church that recognizes, authorizes, and enforces them.

11. One of the chief criticisms of the liberal/modernist movement has been the dogmatic language and authority forced upon God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The question, then, is what is the nature of a truth-statement and its relationship with the community of faith. Modernism is “... concerned with the historical method of discovering the permanent values of Christianity, and the religious rather than the theological test of religion” (22). Historically, when dogmatic truth has been connected to the community it has caused wars. (Shailer Matthews, The Faith of Modernism (New York: MacMillan, 1925), 24-25.) “Christ comes to act upon the individual believer on the one hand through the historical remembrance of Him which is possible in the Church, on the other hand as the permanent Author of all the influences and impulses which are due to other men, and like in nature to Himself; and this necessarily takes place in a personal, and not in a material form. ... Faith in Christ is neither belief in the truth of His history nor assent to a scientific judgment of knowledge such as that presented by the Chalcedonian formula. It is not a recognition of His Divine nature of such a kind that, in affirming it, we disregard His life-work and His action for the salvation of those who have to reckon themselves as belonging to His community. In so far as trust in Him includes a knowledge of Him, this knowledge will determine the value of His work for our salvation” (Albrecht Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine. 2nd ed., ed. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 591).

12. Truth has been used as a tool for unity; it has been invested in the highest office to govern and hold together that office’s constituency. Truth has been made the equivalence of the consensus as it rises from the constituency. But, truth must stand apart and even against its handlers. Truth is different from the result of an election, it must inform from without.

14. The Reformation view was that truth in the New Testament was itself a unity that stood above any particular understanding or formulation, even that of the disparate Apostles. There is still a consensus formed under a given understanding of the doctrine governed by Scripture, but it is not a consensus formed on the authority and duty of the church to forge the Scripture into what it should say as a theological unity. The move from the authority of the Catholic Church affirmed the objective nature of theological truth but shifted it out of the hands of the institutional authority.

15. Truth became formed in debate – dialectic on a number of levels with a number of factors in contention. This takes it out of the hands of the few and tries to remove it from any agenda.

16. Doctrine is the result of witness – the witnesses are to an event of God’s revelation in Christ. Doctrine is a summary of the ‘central theme of Scripture.’

17. Truth informs – it is accessible but never mastered or static among mortals.

Pannenberg takes his cue from Barth. Theology or dogmatics assumes that truth informs human thought. But an established rule is contrary to the nature of witness as the diversity, as the Apostles demonstrates, and the Lordship of God. Dogmatics is, then, always responding to witness and allowing the witnesses to hear and see and examine and this renews their consensus.
§3 Dogmatics as Systematic Theology

p. 18. Doctrine – a proclamation (subjective); Dogma – a content (objective); Dogmatics – a study: a “comprehensive and coherent presentation of the doctrinal content of scripture and the articles of faith … in the sense of both positive restatement and learned argumentation.”

p. 19. Theology is systematic as far as it presents the content as a connected and coherent whole. “It tests the truth of what is presented. If truth can only be one, the things that are regarded as true will to contradict one another, and they can be united with one another.” A scientific frame of thought allows a method, but has a ‘shelf life.’ Whatever system is used is connected to time and age and must be revisited with new thinking (modernism employed a scientific method in the tradition of the Enlightenment). Each historical method grapples with the revelation that was and is real – each method, therefore, enters into the discussion. (“In the Church there are fathers: father Luther, father Calvin, other fathers. Why should a free theologian not be their son and disciple? … Why should he not respect the freedom of the fathers to let them express their wisdom and then learn from them what in his own freedom he may and can learn from them” (Karl Barth, “The Gift of Freedom,” in The Humanity of God (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 94))

p. 20. To what extent can reasoning be a tool and what form of reasoning is best suited to the task?

p. 22. In systematic theology the criterion of coherence plays a chief role. That is, “both the interrelation so the parts and the relation to other knowledge.” It can take the revealed truths as true but then, as Aquinas did, set up a rational superstructure in addition.

p. 24. Pannenberg assumes a truth exists outside or antecedent to any particular construction or critical interaction that pertains to it. An investigation must presume and operate upon a notion of the truth and not only the traditional or contextual construction. “The priority of divine truth over all human opinions and judgments is not simply identical to the human authorities, i.e., scripture and church doctrine.”

p. 25. *Dogmatics handles an objective truth subjectively. It recognizes that its subject-matter is not merely the subjective result of some witness or construction but that both its own investigation of the subject-matter and the construction in its view are subjective matters that cohere to an objective truth.

p. 26. Enlightenment disintegrated Catholic tradition/authority and Protestant confidence in the scripture as authoritative. The result was Trent and Vatican I in the Catholic tradition, both of which shored up the role of the Church as authoritative office of interpretation and teaching. In the Protestant tradition efforts were made to codify verbal-plenary inspiration on the one hand and, on the other, make pious experience the source of authority after Schleiermacher. (see p. 29).

p. 26. Prolegomena sought to undergird the methods by which dogmatics used Scripture as a reasonable text on which to draw authority.
§4 The Development and Problem of So-called Prolegomena to Dogmatics

p. 31. Reformation – Scripture’s harmony and effectiveness is a reflection of God’s own unity and infallible self-consistency, that is, his guarantee that the Scripture will be effective in its task is that it is harmonious and clear.

p. 32. In order to bolster the Reformation conception of Scriptures ability to be clear and sufficient it was (1) reflective of God’s character and therefore inspired and (2) in the 17th-century given the quality of wholly verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and not susceptible to any human or Satanic corruption.

p. 34. Neo-Protestantism took the Calvinist notion of the Holy Spirit’s close connection with the words of Scripture and made the subjective experience of the Spirit the victor of objective truth where objective truth was attacked by various forms of reasonable criticism. If verbal inspiration was not strong enough, experience of Spirit was.

p. 35. The history of Scripture as a source of revelation: interpreted by the Church → alone authoritative → interpreted by the academic method → consistent as God is consistent and for us → divinely inspired → inspired wholly → subjective spiritual inspiration → words are contextual and accommodating → scripture reflects contextual, human truth

p. 37. The pressing concerns of rational criticism and Enlightenment challenge to authority drive the theologians to personal experience as a criterion for correct understanding. But how far does personal ability make revealed theology contingent upon itself?

p. 39. Theology is reserved for study, and religion is faith and for everyone.

p. 41. Here is Schleiermacher’s turn. He built on the results of Enlightenment’s challenge to authority and Scripture. Semler questioned the Scriptures’ authority to be an unbroken whole of binding divine teaching because of its use of accommodating or contextual language. Experience and piety in the faith/religion was a more accurate source of truth. Schleiermacher elevated pious acts in the Church and allowed those to suffice in the place of antiquated creeds.

p. 42. Common experience of conversion and the community of faith inform theological knowledge. “According to I. A. Dorner Christian experience of Christian faith is the noetic source of dogmatics as well as ethics…” Albrecht Ritschl used the Christ’s establishment of an ethical community that stands in contrast to the world as the criterion by which to adjudge theological knowledge.

p. 45. Barth’s effort to free himself of subjectivism did not work b/c he began with faith and the church. But really a Word that created those things as it spoke.

p. 47. Barth dismissed the aspect of experience as the norm of theology in a whole scale manner. He does not account for the role it must play. It must be an ongoing process that is not the absolute norm but along for the journey nonetheless.

§5 The Truth of Christian Doctrine as the Theme of Systematic Theology
50. Christian theology must not presuppose the divine truth – it must make it open to test. Contra Anselm: ‘that God exists.’ Faith is supplemented by reflection.

51. Faith before reason, Barth argued from Anselm, because God reveals Himself at the very beginning if faith is even possible. The rest is finding out, according to his reading of Anselm, or adducing evidence according to Aquinas (so ought he to believe matters of faith, not on account of human reason, but on account of the Divine authority. Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit” ST II-II, q. 2, a. 10.)

52. Faith (as a starting point) taints the result of the experiment/investigation. If God is real, He can demonstrate it independent of the original assumption of his existence.

53. *Truth belongs fully to God – there is no subjective handling of truth, if it is truth, that falls outside of God’s truth. If truth is had, it only follows God’s truth as it has been given; it cannot be true and different from or truer than God.

54. Theology will represent truth only as far as it is “riveted as such to the conditions of finitude.” It is bound to time, and we may know God’s truth in the manner of our time bound existence.

56. The nature of theology done by creatures makes it incomplete; substantive in its own right, but not final. Theology is hypothesis (but not principle/law – it is provisional).

58. ¶ *A disposition directed to the testing of truth statements reflects a commitment to their serious objective nature. That God can be known through debate or investigation is an affirmation of His existence and power.

59. If truth is true, it does not resist test – it will not fail test. Dogmatics is systematic because God is not separate from His world and His world does not lead to any truth but His because of that.

60. ¶ A dogmatic system is true in so far as it corresponds to the truth – it might be displeasing, but it could be true.
Semler, Ritschl, and others emphasized the domain of religion. The truth of God became the result of the concept of pious feeling and action (and sometimes only the experience of conversion.) God was to be found at the end of moral actions and community and wholly derived from what is immediately accessible to the individual. Karl Barth, through personal experiences having to do with the both World Wars, issued a decisive retort to this subjective-dominated tradition. Barth’s response, according to Pannenberg, turned too sharply against the legitimate place of human subjectivity. The Swiss theologian determined that, in the shadow of the failure of both the divine inspiration of Scripture and the neo-Protestant recourse to experience to secure the authority of God, a new source of authority was needed. He offered the reality of the Word of God as fixed in faith. Pannenberg’s criticism was that Barth committed the same error in a different form: he established a means by which “the truth of Christian doctrine must be established in advance of all discussion of its content.” So, while Barth’s identification of the problem was correct, he merely established another general truth claim by which the content of theology should be deduced. Pannenberg’s solution, in contrast, recognized the objective truth as the end of an inductive handling of the content of revelation. If God is true, then he can and will be found at the end of a critical investigation of His historical revelation. Faith is at the end of the journey for Pannenberg instead of at the beginning for Barth. Moreover, God has given himself to be found in this manner because it is proper to the finite human being who finds him or herself in the course of time with the powers of sensation. God as an objective truth can be found, but not mastered, through a process of careful, comprehensive, and provisional scientific investigation because his story is true. His perfection rises from imperfection – as infinite he is not bound by finite constraints but takes them into himself.

2) The Concept of God and the Question of Its Truth

§1 The Word “God”

p. 64. ‘God’ is a concept with little currency in today’s culture – it is unproven and dismissed out of hand. It is not a concept that can be dispensed with by Christians given the central idea of belief in Christ.

p. 65. Experience cannot be the basis or source of faith, even though it is very closely associated. Nietzsche and Freud undid what Pietism and Awakening established in this regard. Experience became associated with a guilty conscience under the German intellectuals.

p. 66. Experience still presupposes the ‘something’ that is experienced – that discloses (itself) in encounter.

p. 67. A particular disclosure event or experience is never isolated from a greater context of knowledge, assumptions, or experiences and so cannot be recognized to be pure source of theology. The concept of God influences and determines the content of the disclosure.

p. 68. In order to know Christ, one must first know the category of ‘God’ so as to know its application to this one instance. One must realize why the word ‘God’ was chosen and how Scripture took hold of the concept and filled it out.

p. 69. Theology uses the metaphysical notions of ‘one God’ in order to gain for itself the power of those arguments for its case for the monotheistic God. It must.

p. 70. Christ as God is upheld by philosophical theology in so far as a unified Creator gives rise to and has relationship to one creation.
71. The word ‘God,’ because it now is empty or blank, stands as the unanswered (and gnawing) question that cannot be abandoned or reduced to experience for this reason. *There is something very powerful about the word/concept that draws out curiosity from a contemporary audience.*

72. Philosophical theology—Socrates/Plato—paved the way by giving a notion of God as the balance to a unified creation. (cf. 77-79; see Clement of Alexandria *Exhortation to the Heathen* 7; *Stromata* 1.20; Justin Martyr *Apology* 5, 2 *Apology* 10; *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* 36; Augustine *City of God* 6.5-7, 8.1, 5-6)

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§2 Natural Knowledge of God and Natural Theology—*describes a development of the history of these concepts and their division leading up to the wars and religion and Enlightenment.*

74. Luther and Calvin still maintain some version of the *cognito naturalis*; Barth is the first theologian to totally contest natural theology (?)

76. The natural knowledge of God as creaturely knowledge must be distinct from the philosophical argument of the doctrine of God. Natural theology is “philosophical doctrine of God as distinct from the mythical theology of the poets on the one side, and on the other the political theology of the cults which the states set up and supported.” The difference is a knowledge of God as one and creator as opposed to the natural ability to ascertain God’s existence.

78. The first purpose of natural theology was descriptive. It assumed the sort of divine being necessary for an origin over and against the pantheon of gods whose being was insufficient for and even contrary to the nature of creation. Natural (logical) arguments were one effect of the already assumed benevolent architect; they merely flipped the argument into an inductive (cosmological) mode. The natural philosophy provided the means by which the Jewish God and Christ could be considered Creator above the pantheon—the specific came to inhabit the category.

80. No contradictions between philosophical theology and Augustine’s doctrine of God.

81. A move away from the accord between philosophical and Christian theology occurred in the 12th century. The transition occurred as certain doctrine, i.e. the trinity, were thought incompatible (un-derivable from) with philosophical speculation. A two-tiered system of natural and revealed theology resulted and understood natural theology in a new manner—as that which was accessible to the human mind by natural means, and not concerning the nature of God.

82. Supernatural claims caused divisions because they pit traditional interpretations (and so *consensus by authority* (pp. 10-11) against one another. If, however, God had created human reason, then reason could be the criterion of truth that led back to God; it opened the door to peace and Enlightenment, which encouraged and diversified this vein of thought. *If the solution to the problem is mounted on humans, then it is mounted on sin (on my will) and fails before it starts, or, is guaranteed to come out exactly wrong. In Christ the problem’s solution is mounted on ‘not my will’ and, as the proper correspondence between the covenant partners, can succeed (Christ is*
sinless is so far as he is servant, not claiming or praying after equality with God.)

§3 The Proofs of God and Philosophical Criticism of Natural Theology

p. 88. Aquinas’ first cause, William of Occam noted, does not need to be involved to keep the chain of causation operating (recall Thomas Paine, God is only first cause) – in Newton’s world of inertia, a continuous cause is unnecessary.

p. 89. Descartes considered his experience more trustworthy than the external argumentation of theoretical proofs. He started the shift to experiential/anthropological proof(s).

p. 90. Like Descartes, Leibniz introduced the anthropological basis for the proof of God by not adhering to the objective validity of the principle of sufficient reason as it concerns the argument of contingency but drawing indirectly from an experience of the world that requires reason. That is, something more is needed to explain the operation of the world than a first cause upon which things and events are contingent upon. Kant understood that some explanation is needed for the necessity of moral laws, laws that he could experience in the world. The explanation is ultimately God, but only through experience of the concepts of moral law and not by an appeal to the established notion of first cause ontology.

p. 92. Hegel suggested and studies the idea that sorts of proofs arise from particular contexts. The correction is that a presupposition of a proof makes that proof possible – creator cosmology makes the cosmological proof (one tied to nature) possible. Feuerbach and Fichte took this further by saying that it is the human condition that gives rise to the concepts of God altogether.

p. 93. Anthropological argument indicates a reality that transcends us, while it is not able to prove God in himself, it locates God in the ‘reality of human self experience.’

p. 95. Natural, philosophical theology describes a need in humankind and an approach to the question of the existence of God. Pannenberg is not prepared to reject natural theology completely despite its inability to “decisively change the situation regarding God’s existence.” They are valuable in that they marshal a human desire to know and give a criterion to what this concept of ‘God’ must be.

§4 Theological Criticism of Natural Theology

p. 96. Buddeus, Clark, and Hume – natural knowledge has given us the knowledge of salvation and the human minds moves towards it by progressive stages. It begins, however, with base passions that are refined (and systematized).

p. 97. Enlightenment: religion at any point is reason in some form. Hume: passion evolved into natural religion by stages, reason does not govern it from outside (reason may come out of passion). Schleiermacher: natural religion is the end of the refinement of the positive religions.

p. 98. Schleiermacher understood the progression of religions and claimed that natural religion as a product, existing in the age of Enlightenment, was the
result of “abstract reflections” on positive religions – on the metaphysics that Ritschl rejected.

p. 99. Harnack: moral religion is refined as it strips away metaphysical speculation.

p. 100. Pannenberg’s criticism of Ritschl (and Harnack, and Frank Viola by the way) is that he ignores the historical means by which the Jewish God could be given currency as a Creator to non-Jews (which was, after all, the mission of the Kingdom of Priests and later the Apostle to the Gentiles) – how He could fit the category of ‘God’ outside the specific and nationalistic pantheon(s). Ritschl’s attempts ignored the apologetic (gift) of metaphysics and relied too heavily on accommodating the criticism of enlightenment reason, which cast dispersions on primitive thinking. He focused too greatly on the divides that Pannenberg has identified: natural theology as referring to the nature of God vs. natural ability to derive God and the divide that Enlightenment criticism created: God as first cause vs. God as the result of human reason.

p. 106. Pannenberg’s criticism of Barth is that the Swiss theologian cast Feuerbach’s notion of human religion across the whole field of Enlightenment and liberal thought. In fact, Schleiermacher and others followed a stream of Baroque and Enlightenment thought that based and investigated humanity upon the sure existence of God. We might say that it was the result of Hitler being described as natural revelation that directed Barth to this position.

p. *107. Pannenberg: Experience and humanity must be brought into the discussion but not used as proof of God. The concepts give a framework to the notion of God that opens the door to talking about what the Christian God is → if true, He will conform to truth. I see Pannenberg as agreeing with the basic tenets of the early American evangelical theology. Thomas Reid in the tradition of the didactic enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense Realism said that what can be sensed can be trusted because it has a form and order that corresponds to the form and order of its Creator. Scientific reality will, when given a careful and comprehensive examination, attest to the creator.

§5 The “Natural” Knowledge of God – describes the way in which a natural knowledge is possible: awareness is not complete knowledge but provides the concept of the ‘other.’

p. 113. (1) Faith hangs on a provider, a God, but faith in this way does not determine the God as only my God, the one I need. (2) It does mean that a concept of ‘other,’ ‘dependence’ and of ‘transcendence’ is possible. If we sense/have experience of God it is valid, not as a tool for understanding but knowing that ‘other’ exists and is beyond.

p. 114. Experience and awareness produce a precise concept of infinite over and against finite. To know how this infinite is God involves a development of the once-faint concept of the ‘other.’ It rises from but is not contained in ‘primordial awareness’ that is innate. Imagine sensing your mother as an infant and knowing only that there is such a thing as other and such a thing as far greater.

p. 115. The earliest notion of ‘other,’ though it be other, is not known to us until we can reflect on it having been carried through the process by the other. Mom
was always mom, but not known as such until later. Or this book, Pannenberg carried us along but not until the whole thing is read and reflected on did the parts make any sense. Experience gives the knowledge (not a priori).

p. 116. A sense of dependence forms from the reality of dependence and is later formed into a knowledge of the dependence. Later experiences answer questions that existed but could only be asked as answers were supplied in experience. Brunner said that knowledge exists only as a vague sense of separation/problem.

p. 118. (Summary) The innate knowledge is made into what it is through an experience of God as He meets humanity in creation and allows them to acquire His reality and truth. Idolatry can only be a side effect of the experiences of God in creation – an unfortunate one. This experience is different from a self-asserted natural philosophical proof and thus, the negative assessment of Ritschl, Barth, and others on the attempts of the nations to prove God is not warranted. It is not pride or rebellion asserting itself but a growing, and occasionally faltering, relationship between experience of God in the world and the understanding of that experience. God stands as an objective truth – innate knowledge – but only dimly, and subject to a growing acquired knowledge wrought in subjective experience and progress in human experience.

3) The Reality of God and the Gods in the Experience of the Religions

§1 The Concept of Religion and Its Function in Theology

p. 120. Religion → the human criteria for what determines the content of revelation and doctrine

a. Religion and the Knowledge of God

p. 123. Human understanding of the materials about God inform and control notions about God as prior to that understanding. By Nicholas of Cusa, in the context of a variety of religious practices/rites, ‘religion’ became known as one knowledge common among differences as determined by the natural knowledge of God.

p. 124. The scripture as source and natural theology of reason (or function of wisdom) prevented natural religion’s priority up to 1800.

p. 125. Natural religion overran the obstacles of scripture and wisdom and put practical reason/needs in the position of priority over supernatural means.

p. 126. Schleiermacher maintained the anthropological principle and, trying to maintain God, made God the result of a deep, religious consciousness of dependence. God was later deposited into psychology so that the concept of God was an evolution of the human mind.

p. 128. Barth’s assertion against, instead of interaction with, the natural religion school is not effective in treating the problem – he did not dialogue Schleiermacher(ians) but noted only where he(they) where wrong.

b. The Concept of Religion, the Plurality of Religions, and the “Absoluteness” of Christianity

p. 130. Christianity is best able to mediate finite and infinite and thus the highest form of general religion.
p. 131. If the reality of religions could be demonstrated through a study of them, then Christianity could be compared and shown to transcend those religions.

p. 133. The Liberal/history-of-religions project takes on the rationalism of Enlightenment(s). Religions are phenomena that in their philosophical or psychological elements, can be measured and compared. A test that is unbiased and controlled can establish the absolute nature of Christianity independent of supernatural assertions.

§2 The Anthropological and Theological Nature of Religion

p. 136. Only in the concrete multiplicity could the common link of religions be found. This could be a functional description only that does not assume the rule of God but removes the concept altogether.

p. 139. Rudolf Otto’s numinous/holy established an object of ‘other’ to which the religious person relates in a concrete experience.

p. 142. Religion always concerns an interaction and gives priority to the deity – religion’s presupposition tries to cut out the deity while its findings all concern the fact of its priority and interaction.

p. 148. Monotheism in some way may be the process of a culture unifying the varied aspects of its concrete existence into a single figure of one God.

p. 149. Is he saying that any modern study of religion, even when it has only the unity of humanity in view as its criterion of study, is still founded in the unity of God?

p. 151. (1) Religious studies that take the humanistic approach are unfaithful to the principles of deity-prior religion. (2) Any search for unity in religion is prompted by unity assumed in monotheism.

§3 The Question of the Truth of Religion and the History of Religion

p. 152. Critics of religion find some human source for the truth-claim or deity of religion. The religious method bypasses the content to look at the effect – the content is critical, however.

p. 153. When religion is criticized, the defenders usually adduce faith or experience (not objective content) in response.

p. 154. Religion finds content as a subjective result – subjective result is possible and true even when that result is objective. Religious theories recognize that this is experienced universally.

p. 155. Schleiermacher argued that religious sense is primary to human experience and not merely a result to some psychological or social process that might not be exercised by some – it is inherent to all.

p. 158. God is not the result of anthropology – and illusion manifested – when God is Origin and Creator – the “power which defines and governs the whole world.” Pannenberg is demonstrating that subjective experience in religion is not necessarily disconnected from an objective source – experience can and does result from objective content as a proper result of that objective content.

p. 159. God is the conclusion, rather, of the experiences of humans – as the end of a test where He was not also the starting point. Pannenberg shows that if indeed God is an origin, then the consequence is subjective experience. This means that subjective experience is not firm proof of a subjective starting
point. This against Feuerbach and others who argue for some loop in which God is merely the middle aspect. See p. 214.

p. 160. God in experience must meet the criterion that is proper to His existence—not some academic or scientific criteria derived from a history of religious philosophy or science, psychology, or economic sociology. The criterion is all-determining reality. If we are going to assess experience in a fair experiment, then the experience cannot be something that, if met, corresponds to something that God would really be. If that test can be passed, it indicates a real origin/God.

p. 162. Cultic gods had an effect on social/historical events and were not merely themselves the result of social/historical factors. That is to say, in the myths of nations the ontological really had an effect on the noetic and not the other way around.

p. 168. A study of the history of religions must recognize the experience of the believers (in a particular deity) as a datum of truth in so far as the experience is expected as a real interaction and tested under the assumption that the deity acts in accordance with the identity or effect that is proper to that deity. A history can be examined this way to give a test of the deity’s legitimacy. If it is shattered, then there is a reliable indication of its legitimacy. Also—experience of the deity is progressive and results in re-definitions and new understandings.

p. 170. The God of Israel proved true to the nation as developments occurred. He did not disappear because the aspect of origin (the central self-determinative claim of the deity) was never proved redundant.

p. 171. The trend towards unity is not the function of human reason causing simplification and progress, but the true deity affecting change over a long process and shaping human views to reflect the truth. It is the process of revelation—the result of self-demonstration of God in history. This is the opposite of the claim of the history of religions school and the principle of progress in Enlightenment thought. Religion was shaped in the way it was because God’s self-revelation acted on the people who experienced it.

§4 The Religious Relation

p. 175. Religious phenomenology/anthropology: no cultus to overcome separation or tension—only outward and inward human concern.

p. 176. Metaphysical definition: God is impersonal and not concrete. It is an approximation of, an abstraction from, the religious tradition and not the final word or conclusion.

p. 177. On one side is mystery and impersonality, on the other, an awareness of concrete manifestation.

p. 182. The prohibition that Paul makes against the worship of creature/idol instead of God counters the rampant practice of “magical control over the deity” by those means.

p. 183. It is necessary because when the finite becomes a means for the manifestation of the Infinite, the Infinite becomes immediately accessible and
liable to manipulation. A holy area and conduct are supposed to prevent this sort of identification and perversion.

p. 184. A description of how infinite manifestation of God is perverted by those who, with access, assert autonomy.

p. 187 (Summary) Relation to God must begin with Him not as a function of our manipulation, as if in either some finite form he is turned into a sort of tap for our needs (or a magical amulet) or as primal history/myth by which we are removed from his active, historical presence in our lives. In both of these cases the tension and distance between parties is removed and the exercise is completely anthropological. Finite media, then, are not the means by which access/communication is established but an historically self-demonstrated revelation of God over and against humanity that contains an eschatological expectation. Self-demonstration that is proper to God as a subject that has relationship to and authority over humankind is the means by which we can and will know God – it is the material to which we must look in our investigation if we have any hope of finding a God that is not merely a projection of our psychology (an idol) and thereby prove that such a God exists. “The historical self-demonstration of the deity must prove to be not merely a reflection of the current philosophy of religion but a constituent part of the self-declaration of deity in the tradition of the relevant religion” (197).

4) The Revelation of God

§1 The Theological Function of the Concept of Religion

p. 190. God is known to Israel in a general way in that they recognize in the one who addresses them the category and definition of ‘God.’ He goes on to give specific information that is not part of ‘God’ as it could be known.

p. 191. God becomes the monotheistic God when the claims of other gods are not met over and against Yahweh’s. His revelation is confirmed in the experience of the recipient.

p. 193. In early OT revelation the claim was specific to Israel and belonged to the nation’s mythos/identity. The change occurred with the forward look to His glory and the human destiny (Isa. 40:5).

p. 194. Revelation as God’s necessary self-disclosure was no longer “self-evident in medieval and modern thought.”

§2 The Multiplicity of Biblical Ideas of Revelation


p. 200. NT looked down on signs as on-command demands for God to prove himself; Jesus forbade this. There was some use of signs, however they were freely given prior to demand.

p. 201. Signs/revelation are contingent upon a knowledge of God, “an element of reflection” upon this prior knowledge.

p. 203. An experience of encounter and commission gives rise to the content of specific or occasional revelations – an initiation.
Tradition undergirded even reformative prophecy. To some extent the encounter always hinged upon an historical relationship.

Disclosure of God in early texts are provisional and only in part – not definitive. Definitive self-disclosure is found in the prophets of the exilic period and manifest in the motif of future deliverance, in this way they become apocalyptic and eschatological.

Revelation is eschatological and provisional – it refers to God’s final plan but as not entirely complete. It has taken place in an historical event and will be finished in an historical event. (Further, it is complete as the events are a total picture).

In primitive Christian theology the biblical them of Christ’s revelation of God’s plan is worked out. They take the NT’s “brief formulas” that sum up the OT writings of “promise and prophecy.”

“By bringing the debatability of religious truth claims into their understanding of truth, they test themselves by the reality of the world so far as we can experience it.” The future glory – the cross – is the experiential truth claim proper to the deity himself; this is the consistent future that endures and is not a reflection of human principles but a divine choice.

§3 The Function of the Concept of Revelation in the History of Theology

In the Patristics the idea of revelation was proved by the incarnation of Christ – the OT as fulfilled prophecy gave rise to the divine sonship which legitimated revelation, including the apostolic Scriptures.

Revelation the result of Christ’s coming ➔ (exchanged) Revelation the indicator of God’s salvation come ➔ Bible inspired and infallible as testimony to Christ ➔ verbal inspiration challenged by Enlightenment critique ➔ revelation as a “contribution to human culture under the direction of divine providence.”

Revelation became an inner communication and a vehicle for moral consciousness. This stands independent of historical facts/inconsistencies.

Schelling and Hegel conceived of God as revealing himself in the whole process of the world. Protestant theology developed the thought of God’s self-revelation in specific historical events and miraculous interventions.

Through Kant and Fichte the process moved: no scriptural inspiration ➔ no natural theology ➔ no moral argument, so: look to some event or interaction whereby God reveals self.

Rothe, working on Nitzsch’s concept of outer revelation developed a “supernatural history” where he looked for actual events of external and unnatural character that demonstrated God’s reality and self-disclosure.

Two categories develop: revelation as manifestation (the Word as historical event) and inspiration (the word as inspired commentary). Rothe: inspiration adds to the content of the external revelation – inspiration determines the historical act, the objective starting point (it interprets, and changes what it sees and produces a resulting depiction)

*Pannenberg hoped to address and correct the difficulties in the notion of the difference between revelation as manifestation of God (witness to the event of
God’s self-disclosure) and revelation as the inspired, God-given narrative/theological text by looking at all history as revelation of God. This history is evaluated by the criterion of God’s vision of the purpose and direction for history as it is given shape in Christ’s work and teaching. Jesus discloses God – is revelation in this sense – only when (can be known by the criterion) the larger and final goal of the world is found in Him or the event of revelation. The test of revelation is whether or not the particular event corresponds to what is proper to God – what He has established as truth about himself and can be accessed subjectively in some way. Revelation as history means that God reveals himself as a whole in the whole of history and the whole of history is manifest to us in Christ as a picture in himself of the eschatological whole that God will bring about in the future (this is prolepsis).

§4 Revelation as History and as Word of God **

p. 242. Barth’s emphasis on the ‘Word of God’ tried to recover a Reformation era authoritarianism that modern, subjective sensibilities will not respond to in the same way (and that is why his programme is ineffective – times change)

p. 243. The variety of revelation, both form and content, given over the course of history serve to make God known to all people – it draws together variety for a unified and effective purpose

p. 244. The knowledge of God is built as a patchwork and done progressively. Its fullness is cumulative and does not run the risk of being contradictory or competitive because it is not complete in each instance.

p. 245. Pannenberg returns to his idea that God reveals Himself in history through a means proper to His plan and receptive to human subjects by a history of interaction with Israel where he promises and then fulfills promise at the end of the history.

p. 247. The provisional but real guarantee/consummation of God’s long-term promise, that thing to which the promise asks us to look – is the coming of Jesus to establish the Kingdom of God’s glory (which he promised in Isa. 40:5) to be perceived by all in Easter. This is the experiential-historical criterion of true God in true religion.

p. 249. The argument is that God’s work in the event of history, because it is that by which God has chosen to confirm His truth/reality/fulfilled promise, is a test, the result of which stands without need of interpretation/inspiration to be convincing.

p. 250. The message is filled with the Spirit as a sort of inherent or prima facie element: the content is compelling.

p. 254. ‘Word’ describes the story as not fully complete – as temporal and anticipatory. The report of past events (of Jesus) makes the story present (and relevant) to those awaiting its significant future fulfillment.

p. 257. The Word of God is the event of revelation in history where God’s final plan or vision for the world, indicated by a variety of biblically-endorsed means of revelation in the course of the history that the Bible records, is given (in Christ) as the real but anticipatory consummation of God’s plan depiction of his glory (which are equivalent).
5) The Trinitarian God

§1 The God of Jesus and the Beginnings of the Doctrine of the Trinity

p. 264 (cf. 304) The Father may be known by the existence and work of the Son. The Son is who he is because he is in compliance with the will of the Father.

p. 377. The deity of Logos and the unity of God which could result from deity in this sense (they are unified in deity), was (reiterated) from the action of Christ as revelation of God’s eschatological ideal – that is, a unity in deity because of a unity in the working out of God’s goal in economy.

§2 The Place of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Dogmatic Structure and the Problem of Finding a Basis for Trinitarian Statements

p. 287. Augustine, Aquinas, and Gilbert, focusing on unity, found the tri-unity to be a matter reserved for faith in the “pure truth of revelation” and not demonstrated.

p. 291. 17th and 18th-century Protestant dogmatics ventured back into the texts of Scripture to ground the doctrine (of Trinity) but could not find that grounding. Without the concept of unity (supplied), biblical exegesis, they said, does not support Trinity. The notion of unity must guide the exegesis from tri-deity to tri-unity.

p. 293. In Schleiermacher’s theology and community the disconnect from scholastic emphasis (p. 291) on divine unity led to a challenge of biblical texts regarding the unified threeness of God (293) and thus to Christ’s deity (292). If they are not unified, then how is Christ deity?

p. 294. Modernist/liberal tradition took the position that the biblical material does not support the conclusion drawn by metaphysical theology and should be re-cast.

p. 299. The doctrine of Trinity must come from the event of revelation with the presupposition of One God from Israel’s Scriptures. Essence and attributes come after as a result of the doctrine of Trinity derived in this way, not the other way around. The function of the doctrine of the essence and attributes of God is that unity becomes a theme that allows us to avoid the confusions when we start with unity of Father or substance, but it cannot be the starting point or the guiding concept.

§3 Distinction and Unity of the Divine Persons

a. The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the Starting Point, and the Traditional Terminology of the Doctrine of the Trinity

p. 305. The terms ‘begotten’ and ‘breathed’ hearken back to a monarchian concept of Trinity and are not found in the text.

b. The Reciprocal Self-Distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit as the Concrete Form of Trinitarian Relations

p. ¶ 310. (cf. 358). * This is a substantial and clear text in ST1 regarding the economic Trinity’s revelation of the immanent Trinity. I find it to be exactly the relationship between the Father and Son that Barth has developed. It is Christ’s character of Son – giving glory to God – that creates distinction, and his eternal corresponding to the claim of the Father to be God that creates unity.
p. 311. The revealed, creaturely reality, given that in it God the Father is eternal, then elevates the Son to eternal so that the relationship maintains.

p. 313. The Son is neither defeated nor lessened, but true to himself when He does anything to glorify the Father. They have unity in kingdom and diversity in Lordship over it. *Their mission absolutely depends on their interrelationship and their interrelationship is one of dependence.* The Father’s self distinction is in having and then giving the Kingdom to the Son. The Son is unified with the Father, and the Father with the Son in that they are Lord/deity over a creation/Kingdom.

p. 315. The Spirit is the means by which the Son glorifies the Father and the way in which the Father can then be known by the existence of the Son who the Spirit manifests. Each acts for the glorification of the other, and not by self-glorifying. The Spirit glorifies the Son and Father and is the Spirit of truth.

p. 319. Intertrinitarian relations as related to origins (begetting, breathing) do not derive from revelation as do the relationships of glorification demonstrating personhood, unity, and distinction do (cf. p. 320).

c. *Three Persons but Only One God*

p. 319. The persons must be understood as “living realizations of separate centers of action.”

p. 321. The intertrinitarian relationships are not parallel in each case and therefore the identities of the personals is not simply comparable – the roles and relationships differ.

p. 327. The monarchy of God rests on the relations of all persons and thus the actions of God at anytime are the actions of Trinity.

§4 The World as the History of God and the Unity of the Divine Essence

p. 332. Trinity does not become what it is by the progression of the events of history but is known properly by the events to which God has committed himself in his inner relations as Resurrected Savior who looks forward to full resurrection.

p. 335. Unity as a divine essence cannot be derived from ontological presupposition but must come from the relations as derived from revelation or else the balance between threeness and oneness will always be tipped in one direction or the other.

6) The Unity and Attributes of the Divine Essence

§1 The Majesty of God and the Task of Rational Discussion of Talk about God

p. 339 (method) Pannenberg carves out a role for philosophical critical reflection as a check on the authority of biblical or traditional doctrine which is itself subject to experience and tradition. *A comprehensive method that takes from all disciplines and critiques from all disciplines.*

p. 340. God has chosen to remain hidden in part until eschaton. Theology must reckon with this reality.

§2 The Distinction between God’s Essence and Existence
Infinite defines and limits finite – human ideas about God, then, are an intuition of the infinite, a notion of perfection comes because the infinite is ontologically prior.

Essence – what it is presupposes Existence – that it is. Before essence is only existence, but existence becomes definite and distinct in essence (what it is).

We need to know what something is in order to grasp it, even if we think that it exists. A material concept is vital to our understanding.

Awareness of God is not plain sight of His essence, but the developing sense of the infinite by the finite things which are limited by the Infinite. On a black and white Batman logo there is a bat formed of white (the presence of all light, of something). It is not a bat, however, unless it is surrounded by the black which is not a thing but the absence of a thing. Yet it defines the boundaries of the thing. Infinite gives rise and limits finite. It is not a ‘what’ but an ‘is’ nevertheless.

Modified quotation: “If the essence of God transcends finite things and their world, then the individual moments of his active presence in the world and in human life are moments in which the essence of God finds manifestation.” God’s manifestation in the material existence of the Son as it demonstrates the relations in the Trinity. The infinite is manifest by the finite. God’s essence is revealed as (1) eternal: Son revealed God’s eternal and final kingdom – eternal Son reveals eternal Father. (2) oneness: they have their existence in each other. (Bonus): The Son reveals the existence (is-ness) of the Father. (3) Love: revealed by the sending of the Son; the Spirit mediates these interactions and so shares the essence that arises from the interaction. The work of the economic Trinity reveals the existence and essence of God. The specific ‘what’ of God is known in manifestation – in revelation. To know the essence or ‘what’ of God completely, the full series of manifestations must be known (or each one must be identical which has already been disproved).

The essence of God takes form in the persons (and the relations thereof) in the Trinity. It does not exhaust the existence of God but brings it near and in a practical mode.

The criticism of God’s attributes/qualities is that they arise in response to human needs and bear the stamp of finitude and therefore do not correspond to, and cannot be derived from, infinity.

In Old and New Testament the notion of God as a rational mind is not found. Rather, God as Spirit and life force in action is dominant.

The nous/rational mind paradigm was formulated in part because it was better than the corporeal pneuma that was available as a concept from Stoicism. Spirit is a better notion of God’s essence because it affords a better concept of God’s interaction as a creative and active force. Nous/intellect breaks down because it does not allow the complete mind anything beyond its perfection – no goals can be set because perfect mind can have no thing in its
future that it does not already realize, no conflict, no doing. New conception of Spirit is available as “force field” which allows for the use of the term Spirit without being corporeal. It can apply to a Spirit that forms the backdrop of interactions and is at the same time a distinct person.

§5 The Concept of Divine Action and the Structure of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes

p. 387. Centers of action, the persons of the Trinity relate with a common will toward their creatures in the economy of salvation.

p. 389. God’s being is known in His action toward the world – his action demonstrates a unity of purpose that makes the monarchy graceful. God is known by His end: creation and consummation in relation to God’s Lordship.

p. 390. Human goals are carried out or pursued on a time continuum and the human is not the same ‘I’ at the beginning as at the end. God’s self-actualizing is not on a time continuum because He is always identical with himself, not better ‘then.’ His eternal essence is complete, but he breaks into creation.

p. 391. * God is the Trinity of persons – his actions and relations inside the Trinity reveal what he is: his essence as unified and distinct, eternal and loving. His existence or reality in this way when held close to creation (like a ray of light directed through a prism) produces his attributes so that things like historical Creator, Redeemer, etc., can be said about him as eternal. In those attributes, through revelation, we have access in a sort of reverse process (inductive process) to the general concepts. That is, we can conclude the immanent trinity by way of economic and subjective realities that in themselves do not make God who he is but exist for us as a consequence of who He is. His goal/eschatological vision for creation (to which we have access but do not make) is the material evidence that is proper to Him and that can accurately reveal Him so that we can ‘reverse engineer’ his attributes, essence, and existence.

p. 394. God as a notion in philosophy that illicits a thought and perhaps clears the way for discussion of God (as the Platonists did for the Fathers) is not the same as the revelation of God’s attributes in terms of accuracy or value.

§6 The Infinity of God: His Holiness, Eternity, Omnipotence, and Omnipresence

a. The Infinity and Holiness of God

p. 400. God’s holiness is opposed to the profane but he enters into the profane so as not simply to stand in antithesis but to be infinite and destroy the antithesis. He enters into the world and makes it holy.

b. The Eternity of God

p. 410. In the economy of salvation – enacted as the immanent Trinity brings it to be, God who is opposed to time/finitude reaches into his antithesis and draws time into his eternity. This is done by establishing his Lordship and thus declaring the eschaton.

c. The Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God

p. 415. God is present and transcends the antithesis of finite/Infinite in the historical actions of the Trinity: Son and Spirit.
p. 421. In the Son’s differentiation and claim of God’s Lordship his distinct but related existence is possible for the creation. Omnipotence overcomes by the act of the Son to overcome the tension between God and creature.

p. 422. Omnipotence is made a matter directly applicable to overcoming antithesis in that God has, in the Trinity, exercised his power so that the Son takes the limitation of finitude and by not self-asserting (in this way), holds open unity with God for those who ruin that unity/fellowship.

§7 The Love of God
a. Love and Trinity
b. Attributes of the Divine Love
c. The Unity of God

p. 448. All the answers of essence and existence are contained in the love of the intertrinitarian relationships and the notion that the goal of God is the consummation in history of that love that exists in Himself.