



**Wolfgang Pannenberg on
Human Destiny**

Kam Ming Wong

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WOLFHART PANNENBERG ON HUMAN DESTINY

Based on one of the greatest living theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg, this book is the first comprehensive study of 'human destiny'. Mapping out the movement of humanity over the course of its history to its common destiny from creation through sin and ethics to eschatology, the book also examines the extent to which scholars such as Herder have influenced Pannenberg's work in this important area and shows how Pannenberg's project on ethics is related to human destiny.

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Published by

Ashgate Publishing Limited

Gower House

Croft Road

Aldershot

Hampshire GU11 3HR

England

Ashgate Publishing Company

Suite 420

101 Cherry Street

Burlington, VT 05401-4405

USA

Ashgate website: <http://www.ashgate.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Wong, Kam Ming

Wolfhart Pannenberg on human destiny. – (Ashgate new critical thinking in religion, theology and biblical studies) 1. Pannenberg, Wolfhart, 1928–2. Fate and fatalism – Religious aspects – Christianity 3. Theological anthropology – Christianity

I. Title

233'.092

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wong, Kam Ming

Wolfhart Pannenberg on human destiny/Kam Ming Wong.

p. cm. — (Ashgate new critical thinking in religion, theology, and biblical studies)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6220-4 (hardcover: alk. paper) 1. Future life — History of doctrines — 20th century. 2. Theological anthropology — Christianity. 3. Pannenberg, Wolfhart, 1928– I. Title.

BT903.W66 2007

230'.44092—dc22

2007005499

ISBN 978-0-7546-6220-4

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall.

To Grace, through whom I see God's grace

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Acknowledgements

Certain materials in Chapters 2 and 3 have been published previously. I gratefully acknowledge the permission of the *Scottish Journal of Theology* and the *Theologische Zeitschrift* to allow the ideas expressed in them to appear in this book.

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Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

The aim of this book is not only to construct a comprehensive theological anthropology with special reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg's thought, but also to study specifically the movement of humanity over the course of its history to its common destiny, to God. With the objective so formulated, our research thematises the purpose of human creations in the most direct way. Within this dynamic, our focus is on the historicity of humanity that manifests itself in the historical process of human becoming. To that extent, human beings are to be understood as creatures who are called to be on their way to the final consummation of their destiny. Our anthropology, therefore, moves beyond merely empirical description of humanness in order to arrive at an understanding of the Christian God as the Author and Finisher of the human world, which is the theme of God's economy of salvation from creation to eschatology. For Pannenberg, the doctrine of creation speaks not only of the existence of an independent world "at the outset", but also of God's providence over the historical process leading to its eschatological consummation. Only the eschatological future marks the answer to the question of the reality of God, the redemption of the world and the destiny of humanity, for the essence of all things is derived from the future consummation.

With these purposes of our study in mind, the starting point of our discussion in Chapter 2 is human creation. We shall explain first why Pannenberg expresses his dissatisfaction with the classical concepts of humans as created in the image of God and the primordial fall of Adam. Are such ideas inadequate, thus failing to elucidate the distinctively Christian understanding of humanity, as apparently claimed by Pannenberg? In contrast to the Augustinian position, which describes the paradise state as lost in the fall, we are to evaluate Pannenberg's assertion that the full image of God is realised not from the beginning but only through the destiny of humanity, which lies yet in the future. In so doing, we examine how Pannenberg critiques and makes use of different theological traditions (for example, Irenaeus) in arriving at his own view. In addition, what exactly is the image of God? What does it consist of? What are its attributes? We shall also present Pannenberg's thought that far from being a matter of one's private life, the human destiny is a communal concept. The responsibility of the Christian is to assist other persons in their realisation of the human destiny, in their becoming human beings in the full sense of existing in the image of God. When constructing his arguments in relation to human destiny and the image of God, Pannenberg draws heavily on Herder, an eighteenth-century scholar who contributed greatly to the subsequent emergence of philosophical anthropology in Germany. However, we claim that Pannenberg does differentiate himself from Herder in a crucial respect, notwithstanding many similarities between them. This chapter ends with a detailed discussion of the Christological foundation argued by

Pannenberg, especially in relation to the role and significance of Jesus Christ and his resurrection in the context of human destiny.

One of Pannenberg's central anthropological arguments is that there is something which tends towards the realisation of the purpose of creation that exists in the being of the human, namely a disposition pointing to the image of God. In Chapter 3, specific attention will be given to the reasons for the original human state being characterised by openness towards one's supernatural fulfilment, which is already present as a future destiny, and corresponds to the single saving event of Jesus Christ in history. Here, Pannenberg follows the strand of philosophical anthropology that includes Scheler and Plessner, who founded the concept of "openness to the world" and its equivalent, "exocentricity" respectively in 1928. Perhaps the most hotly debated issue of Pannenberg's anthropology is whether his concept of human openness *effectively* constitutes an anthropological argument for the existence of God, regardless of whether or not Pannenberg himself is aware of it. In other words, the question to be investigated is whether his thought concerning human openness leads necessarily to an argument for the existence of God. It is also one of the tasks of this chapter to relate the concept of openness to the world to many different aspects of human life in order to demonstrate its depth, richness and multiplicity as a foundation underpinning our human essence and destiny (for example, openness to the world as the source of human imagination). While it is understandable why Pannenberg appeals to the creation account rather than anything else for direct biblical support of the concept of openness to the world, we shall explore salvation and covenant as possible themes, which also lend themselves readily to the application of the idea of human openness. In modern anthropology, openness to the world cannot simply involve openness to the *world*. Otherwise, the relation of human beings to the world would not be fundamentally different from that of animals to their environment. Through a series of arguments, Pannenberg builds his case that openness to the world has to mean openness beyond the world to God. Openness to God becomes, for Pannenberg, the bridge out of the poverty of the natural beginning point of humanity into the full realisation of human destiny. As we shall demonstrate, this is an important area where Pannenberg has successfully integrated anthropology and theology.

Without doubt, the destiny of humanity is not seen as something that is always and everywhere already realised. This is, indeed, the reality of sin. To be sure, Pannenberg's doctrine of sin is of crucial importance to our understanding of his whole enterprise of theological anthropology, for sin, together with the metaphor of the image of God, constitutes the most significant theological issue in this part of his work. The doctrines of the image of God and sin thematise two basic aspects between anthropological phenomena and the reality of God. The aim of Chapter 4 is to show that sin, being the failure to achieve human destiny, destroys human identity and breaks the unity of human reality. In this chapter, we shall first discuss how Pannenberg introduces the Augustinian doctrine of sin, and through this process it is clear that Pannenberg puts himself in the Augustinian trajectory in many respects. In particular, we shall analyse the key Augustinian concepts of concupiscence, self-love and pride. This is to be followed by an examination of Pannenberg's anthropological concept of sin as self-centredness. Interestingly, there are times when Pannenberg says that the self-centredness of life is not itself sinful. So why, then, is

Pannenberg not prepared to condemn all forms of self-centredness? As Pannenberg locates sin in the natural conditions of human existence, one should also feel it legitimate to ask whether this can be taken to mean that human essence is sinful. This potent question inevitably brings us back to the wider issue of responsibility for sin. We shall conclude the chapter by addressing the shortcomings of Pannenberg's doctrine of sin, with suggestions that continue to relate closely to our overall theme of human destiny, and thereby also human creatureliness.

This brings us onto the final part of our investigation into whether the destiny itself is simply a moral destiny. In other words, can it be reduced to ethics? Our key objective in Chapter 5 is to determine precisely whether it is sufficient to describe Pannenberg's view as that which says, "human destiny is eschatological rather than ethical, though moral ramifications or consequences are not ruled out." However, is there anything more to this argumentation? In order to address this issue adequately, we have to analyse the meaning of "eschatological" and "ethical" in turn. We shall first examine the basic functions of eschatology in Pannenberg's theology. Then, we shall look into the content of human destiny to see if it is eschatological by nature. In other words, what kind of future lies ahead of us? In this chapter, we are to focus on, particularly, the kingdom of God, which seems to be the single most important eschatological theme for Pannenberg, as all the others are subsumed under it. As for ethics, we are not to engage ourselves in specific ethical deliberations in this chapter. Rather, our task is to examine in Pannenberg how ethics should be formulated and what are its bases. What is the significance of Pannenberg's claim of universal validity for ethics? Is it simply that ethics has an eschatological foundation, which is the kingdom of God? This gives rise to another, albeit similar, question of the relation between ethics and dogmatics within Christian theology: that is, whether ethics should take priority over dogmas, or vice versa. Of particular importance, we shall identify and present the changes of Pannenberg's standpoints over these matters. We argue that such changes have not been highlighted by either Pannenberg himself or secondary commentators.

Notwithstanding the significance of the idea of human destiny, Pannenberg himself has not devoted any single piece of work specifically to this topic. His major anthropological work, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*,¹ is markedly different from our project in both its approach and, as a result, its scope. Perhaps due to Pannenberg's own agenda of apologetics and passionate interest to interact with other intellectual disciplines at the time, his *Anthropology* has a heavy presence of social and psychological theories. Stewart comments aptly, "Pannenberg can be distinguished from other major theologians of the second half of the twentieth century by the intellectual seriousness with which he treats the natural and social sciences."²

1 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

2 Jacqui A. Stewart, *Reconstructing Science and Theology in Postmodernity: Pannenberg, Ethics and the Human Sciences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 2. Similarly, Elisabeth Dieckmann writes, "Der durch diese Konvergenz [of the opinions of human science and theology] möglich werdenden kritischen Diskussion der Befunde von Humanbiologie und philosophischer Anthropologie aus der Perspektive der Theologie sowie der darin

Here, as well as in many other aspects of his thought, Pannenberg makes a deliberate and clear break with Barth, whom he criticises as arbitrary and subjectivist, for Barth rejects secular anthropology and builds theological anthropology on a purely biblical and Christocentric basis. By contrast, Pannenberg sees theological anthropology as a demonstration of the coherence of secular knowledge with knowledge of humanity that is primarily theologically given. His task is to move theology out of isolation and dogmatism, and his mission is to make Christianity open to other intellectual disciplines and secular disciplines open to Christianity. Worthing points out, “Pannenberg contends that since the 19th century there has been no choice for theologians but to begin with and base their argumentation upon anthropology ... [He] makes the secular or profane anthropologies the deliberate starting point for his theological anthropology.”³ However, we argue that the truth of the matter is that Pannenberg *remains* at that starting point throughout his theological anthropology. As a result, the end-product of *Anthropology* is not the kind of theological anthropology that most systematic theologians would come to expect, and has consequently failed to generate much theological resonance.

To be sure, it is not Pannenberg’s intention to offer a theological anthropology in the form of a *dogmatic* anthropology. Instead, “the studies undertaken here may be summarily described as a *fundamental–theological* anthropology. This anthropology does not argue from dogmatic data and presuppositions. Rather, it turns its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology and examines the findings of these disciplines with an eye to implications that may be relevant to religion and theology.”⁴ In other words, Pannenberg confronts the major issue of what the sciences tell us about humanity itself. In *Anthropology*, Pannenberg brackets out virtually all the Christian doctrines, with the only major exceptions being the doctrines of the image of God and sin. Even so, it is not an exhaustive account of sin. The absence of any discussion of sin in the context of human creatureliness is a case in point. The inclusion of those two doctrines in his anthropological work is understandable. For they can easily be put into dialogue with the anthropological data, primarily via openness to the world and self-centredness respectively. However, we would argue that given the way the concepts of human destiny and the image of God are defined by Pannenberg, the inclusion of his Christological and soteriological justifications is inescapable, as are his thought of eschatology and the question of the relevance of ethics. While Pannenberg’s statement in one of his earliest essays is too abstract to be of much help,⁵ what Pannenberg says in his more recent *Systematic Theology*

gewonnenen Einsicht in die Grundstruktur der menschlichen Lebensform kommt eine Schlüsselrolle für das Verständnis der theologischen Anthropologie Pannenbergs als ganzer zu”, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen. Ihre Deutung im theologischen Denken Wolfhart Pannenbergs* (Altenberge: Oros, 1995), p. 39.

3 Mark William Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science: Theological Method and Apologetic Praxis in Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Rahner* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 175.

4 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 21.

5 “The source material of theological anthropology is not different from that of philosophical anthropology, that is, the phenomena which characterise human existence”

is closer to the mark: “A full theological anthropology would have to include as well the actualising of this destiny, which is the theme of God’s redeeming work, its appropriation to and by us, and its goal in the eschatological consummation.”⁶ Nonetheless, our study is not meant to be a complete theological anthropology in any general sense, but, as we shall see, one with a focus sharpened and driven by the theme of human destiny.

Before commencing discussion on our main subject matter, it should be useful at the beginning of our research to highlight certain characteristics of the methodology employed in Pannenberg’s theology, for they will recur throughout the subsequent chapters. This is certainly not a critical evaluation, nor even an exhaustive account, of Pannenberg’s theological methods, but merely a brief overview in broad strokes. While admitting that we would run the risk of oversimplifying the issues involved, the complexity of which can be gauged by the huge volume of both primary and secondary research that the topic has managed to generate over the years, on balance it would do more harm than good if we were to simply ignore it altogether in this present study. We cannot over-emphasise how crucial methodology is for Pannenberg’s entire enterprise. As Worthing rightly observes, “Pannenberg has focused more attention on questions of theological method than most contemporary theologians.”⁷ In addition, it should be noted that some of the doctrines or themes may, and indeed do, exhibit the application of more than one aspect of Pannenberg’s methodology.

Perhaps of the most central importance for Pannenberg is his belief that God is the ground of truth, and thus all truth ultimately comes together in God. For Pannenberg, the truth question has always to be answered upon theological reflection and reconstruction. As such, he strongly asserts that theological affirmations must be subjected to rigorous critical inquiry concerning the historical reality on which they are based. The goal of theology is to bring all human knowledge together in our affirmation of God. In other words, theology engages all human knowledge in order to articulate a relevant Christian interpretation of the whole of reality. It seeks to show how the postulate of God illumines all human knowledge. Insofar as this is the case, theology should be seen as the demonstration of the truth of the Christian faith for all humanity. Hence, Pannenberg argues against any attempt to divide truth into autonomous spheres or to segregate the truth content of the Christian tradition from modern rational inquiry. The force of his argument is that the rift between Christianity and modernity is a false divide, which not only isolates Christianity, but also undermines modern ways of knowing. This forms the backdrop to his lifelong battle against what he considers the subjectivist approach of modern Protestant theology. In particular, he rejects the idea of its introducing a subjectivism that weakens or removes the rational basis for faith. Predictably, not everyone agrees with his viewpoint, and Molnar argues that Pannenberg’s theology is grounded in the experience of anticipation and embodies the very subjectivism which he has

(“On the Theology of Law”, in *Ethics*, trans. Keith Crim [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981], p. 34).

6 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 2:180.

7 Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science*, p. 66.

criticised in Barth.⁸ In the meantime, it is important to note that on account of its historicity, all human talk about God (that is, theology) unavoidably falls short of full knowledge of the truth of God. Theological concepts and interpretations must be understood as anticipatory and open. For Pannenberg, all dogmatic statements, like other human assertions, are hypotheses to be tested by means of their coherence with other knowledge. This is, indeed, the basis and the justification for Pannenberg's anthropological manoeuvre, and firmly underpins our argumentation throughout this study. Moreover, theology's anticipatory interpretations refer to a definitive future revelation, the certainty of which can be verified only eschatologically. In other words, until the eschaton, a sense of provisionality always surrounds truth claims. Thus, dogmatics and its God hypothesis as well as any anthropological claims remain contestable until the fullness of time, when faith turns to sight and trust is rewarded.

The second, related point about Pannenberg's methodology has been well put by Jenson in his opening remark in an article on Pannenberg: "It is always a good maxim when reading Wolfhart Pannenberg: remember that it has been his overriding concern to assert the *universality* of the Christian claim, and indeed of any claim that speaks of God. Accordingly, he has denounced every retreat of theology into isolation from other intellectual enterprises, and has determined to make no claims that are plausible only inside a 'storm-free refuge'."⁹ Pannenberg himself summarises his viewpoints succinctly in *Anthropology*: "Without a sound claim to universal validity Christians cannot maintain a conviction of the truth of their faith and message. For a 'truth' that would be simply my truth and would not at least claim to be universal and valid for every human being could not remain true even for me."¹⁰ Indeed, one could argue that insofar as God is the ground of all truth and the Creator of all being, then surely God must be relevant for all that exists. This is the basis for any connection between the divine and the profane. It is also the development of Pannenberg's theological position in interaction with current scientific, historical and anthropological views of reality that he expects will lend additional credence to his argument that Christianity has a universal claim to truth regarding the nature of reality. To be more precise, his claim of universality has a twofold implication. On the one hand, the knowledge of God or the speech about God must be relevant to all other areas of knowledge, even to non-Christian religions. After all, if God is what we say he is, there should be no aspect of the created world and thereby no area of knowledge for which God and the knowledge of and from God is irrelevant. On the other hand, the knowledge acquired by other disciplines is necessarily relevant to theology for the same reason. The application of Pannenberg's idea of universality is evident in his anthropology and its Christological foundation. Pannenberg believes that if theologians try to claim universal validity for their assertions, they must argue for this validity, not on the

8 See Paul D. Molnar, "Some Problems with Pannenberg's Solutions to Barth's 'Faith Subjectivism'", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 48 (1995): 315–39, esp. 325 and 330.

9 Robert Jenson, "Jesus in the Trinity: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Christology and Doctrine of the Trinity", in Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (eds), *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 188.

10 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 15.

thoughts of subjective faith, but on the basis of anthropology, which “deals with the universal and always valid structures of humanness.”¹¹ Thus, as we shall see, Pannenberg appeals to the anthropological idea of “openness to the world” to give universal credence to his theological conception of the image of God. In addition, as we shall see in the final section of Chapter 2, Pannenberg lays great emphasis on the universal aspect of Jesus’ resurrection, namely that the ultimate destiny of the world – resurrection and judgement – has happened in Jesus, neither for himself alone nor simply as a chronological first, but rather as the prolepsis in one man of that which is, due to his mediation, the destiny of us all.

Third, is the primacy of history. For our purposes in anthropology, we shall see that this concept of history is demonstrated most clearly in the unfinished character of the historical process of human becoming and in Pannenberg’s argument that human life takes concrete form in history. For him, history and philosophy of history serve to make it possible to summarise human reality as a whole, even providing a perspective on the still open future of humanity. Thus, he can argue that “the universality of history marks human life itself and is inseparable from the coming into existence and passing away of this life.”¹² However, it is important to emphasise that the unity of history is established by the appearance of the end of all events through God’s revelation in Jesus. What is more, as the history of humanity achieves unity only in the light of the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in the final analysis it is Jesus who embraces the world process into the unity of a single history.

Fourth, Pannenberg is a rationalist, being led by thorough enquiry to affirm as the most reasonable belief what otherwise could be asserted *only* on the basis of faith. On this aspect of methodology,¹³ he has been criticised for being too overtly rational.¹⁴ Holwerda critiques, “Pannenberg’s central thesis is that reason precedes faith and provides the foundation on which faith rests. His thesis is, not the traditional ‘I believe in order that I may know’, but the more modern ‘I know and so I believe’.”¹⁵ We, however, do not agree to this reading of Pannenberg’s thought. For him, the relation between faith and reason is not one-dimensional and certainly not one-directional. Thus, we also do not concur with Cobb’s interpretation that Pannenberg “is prepared to believe whatever the evidence appears to him to warrant and nothing more.”¹⁶ In contrast, Grenz has presented Pannenberg’s standpoint truly and fairly: “As a public discipline theology’s purpose is that of giving a ‘rational account of

11 *Ibid.*, p. 487.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 486.

13 For a general introduction to the rationality debate, see F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), Ch. 1.

14 See Rory A. Hinton, “Pannenberg on the Truth of Christian Discourse: A Logical Response”, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 27 (1992): 312–18, and David Holwerda, “Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg”, in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 265–316.

15 Holwerda, “Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection”, p. 304.

16 John B. Cobb, “Wolfhart Pannenberg’s ‘Jesus: God and Man’”, *Journal of Religion*, 49 (1969): 193.

the truth of faith' ... This central orientation to 'rational accounting' is foundational to the mandate of the church itself as he [Pannenberg] understands it."¹⁷ This way of thinking is clearly borne out by Pannenberg's praising of the Augustinian model of concupiscence as an explanation of sin and by his own version of sin as self-centredness, both of which, as shown in Chapter 4, are said to be superior due to their empirical orientation. Thus, faith and reason should not be treated as distinctly independent of each other. Nor does faith bring with it any kind of additional knowledge not already to be found in the content of revelatory history. Pannenberg's position was further clarified at the Fourth World-Discourse conference in Germany in 2000, when he commented on the apparent opposition of faith and reason: "Our ability to understand has limits; that is the nature of human reason. If there is something beyond the limits of our understanding, that does not contradict reason. On the contrary, faith and reason complete one another, if the latter is correctly understood, not with the claim of being able to understand and evaluate everything, and if, at the same time, faith does not regard itself as omniscient. Our theological knowledge is 'incomplete', as Paul says, and therefore finite. The humility of faith itself brings us to this understanding of reason in the knowledge that completion is still in the future."¹⁸ Of course, faith in this respect is not blind faith or trust, for it is directed only to that which shows itself trustworthy; that is, it is not devoid of reasonable grounds, but has to be intellectually responsible.

Fifth, for Pannenberg, Scripture is the basic Christian authority. He appeals to Scripture not as a biblical scholar, but as a systematic theologian. However, while his theology is Bible-centred, it is undoubtedly not fundamentalistic in the sense that he rejects the traditional doctrine of inspiration, which conservative theology sees as fundamental and non-negotiable. In a book review, Tracy comments that Pannenberg's use of scriptural scholarship is "of vital importance to the systematic theologian, for his many works are nothing less than unique in contemporary systematic theology for the extent of their dependence upon, and thematisation of, some of the more important results of several schools of biblical scholarship."¹⁹ Pannenberg gives the critical use of Scripture a highly visible role in the context of the "history of the transmission of traditions." In addition, the role of Scripture in his theology provides a weight against unrestrained conversion to philosophy. His usage of Scripture is not simply to present a delineation of the Christian faith that reflects the main themes of the Bible as he understands them; it is also a systematic work to correlate Christian belief with all available knowledge. This function of Scripture is particularly evident in Pannenberg's arguments relating to the image of God and human destiny. As we shall see, in the formulation of his thought in this respect, Pannenberg sets himself

17 Stanley Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 216–17.

18 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Discussion of the Progress and Completion of History, Life after Death, and the Resurrection of Human Persons in Christianity and Islam", in Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life after Death of the Human Person in the World Religions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), p. 101.

19 David Tracy, "Review of Jesus – God and Man, and Revelation as History", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 31 (1969): 285.

the task to reconcile the Old Testament saying about the human creation according to the image of God with the Pauline statements that call Jesus Christ the image of God and that speak of the transformation of believers into this image.

Sixth, while Pannenberg's concept of the primacy of the future and anticipation is inspired primarily by Heidegger, Pannenberg takes it a step further and believes that only a final future, a place beyond history like the eschaton, can provide a totality that is truly total and unsurpassable by any further history. Thus, even the idea of universal history has to be comprehended from a theological or, more precisely, an eschatological perspective. For the eschatological future is identical with the eternal being of things. As Shults comments, Pannenberg "is consistently following out the implications of his commitment to the ontological priority of the future, and to an idea of God as the power of the future."²⁰ Pannenberg himself also spells out clearly, "It is from the future that the abiding essence of things discloses itself, because the future alone decides what is truly lasting."²¹ This is particularly so, as he believes that "the future is not simply an extrapolation from and a continuation of past and present but a reality in its own right ... God continuously brings forth new creations and thus confronts each present time with a future that is different from it."²² Fiddes explains correctly, "If the end is the whole, events in the past cannot be regarded as frozen and static. They are open in meaning to a continually expanding horizon of interpretation as history proceeds."²³ He continues, "Things do not simply increase in meaning as history moves onwards, but they *are what they are* out of the wholeness of the future."²⁴ The future *determines* the specific meaning, the essence, of everything by revealing what it really was and is. The future interprets the past and the present; all other interpretations are helpful only to the extent that they anticipate the future. Pannenberg writes, "The constant anticipation of the future not only prevents the unity of consciousness from being continually disrupted by every new alteration but also allows it to see in things present and past what these perceived things are not yet in themselves but will or at least can become."²⁵

It will be apparent in later chapters that Pannenberg has employed extensively the concept of the ontological priority of the future in his arguments over eschatology, image of God, as well as Jesus' resurrection that is indispensable for the Christological foundation of anthropology. For instance, Pannenberg does not limit the reflective confirmation character of Easter to epistemology, but rather views it ontologically. It is surprising to read these comments made by Fiddes: "He [Pannenberg] first developed this conviction from Christology, observing that what is *revealed* of Jesus in his resurrection must be true, backwards, of Jesus in his life and ministry:

20 F. LeRon Shults, "Constitutive Relationality in Anthropology and Trinity: The Shaping of the Imago Dei Doctrine in Barth and Pannenberg", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 39:3 (1997): 309.

21 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 525.

22 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Future and the Unity of Mankind", in *Ethics*, trans. Crim, p. 178.

23 Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 212.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

25 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 525.

‘the resurrection event has retroactive power’. The resurrected Jesus is the crucified Jesus; so the one who is *revealed* as Son of God and Lord in his resurrection from the dead must always have been the true Son. In rising from the dead Jesus *reveals* God fully, in the sense that he *reveals* God’s purpose for all humanity to attain fellowship with God; so he must always have been ‘one with the being of God’” (emphasis mine).²⁶ Here, Fiddes does not seem to have gone far enough; that is, it is insufficient to stress simply that what turns out to be true in the future will then be evident as having been true all along.²⁷ What is at stake is more than just the meaning of the resurrection event. For Pannenberg, without resurrection Jesus would not be the Son of God. We would argue that the core essence of Pannenberg’s presupposition of the ontological priority of the future is not about retroactively defining or revealing something; rather, it is retroactively constitutive. Hence, Jesus’ resurrection is not only constitutive for our perception of his divinity, but it is ontologically constitutive for that divinity.

Last, one can easily deduce from our discussion thus far that Pannenberg’s philosophical allegiance is to a wide range of philosophers rather than to just any particular one.²⁸ Thus, Pannenberg is not a Hegelian. Nor is he just a Diltheyian, Heideggerian, Herderian, Gadamerian or Blochian. In particular, Clayton concludes, “Given the far-reaching disagreements and modifications, there is more than a little truth to Westphal’s comment, ‘Pannenberg may well be the most articulate anti-Hegelian since Kierkegaard.’”²⁹ Grenz also asserts that some critics “tend prematurely to dismiss Pannenberg’s theology as Hegelian.”³⁰ This view is shared by Buller, who specifically points out that “Pannenberg develops an understanding of history that is more contingent and open than Hegel’s concept of reality.”³¹ Shults also usefully draws our attention to Pannenberg’s severe criticism of Hegel’s view of “Geist” in an essay soon after the publication of his *Anthropology*: “Hegel saw ‘spirit’ as the actualisation of self-consciousness, but Pannenberg sees it as the elevation of a human being above his or her ego.”³² Thus, labelling Pannenberg Hegelian is unlikely to stick in view of the significant number of writings that clearly show that Pannenberg has moved beyond Hegel. More recently, Wenz enters into the debate by quoting a statement made by Pannenberg himself in 1990 in defence of his non-Hegelian position: “I am not a Hegelian. I just happen to think that Hegel was one

26 Fiddes, *The Promised End*, p. 212.

27 It is unclear whether Fiddes has done this on purpose and holds the same view as Clayton that a future epistemology would be sufficient for Pannenberg. See Philip Clayton, “Being and One Theologian”, *The Thomist*, 50 (1988): 645–71.

28 For discussions on Pannenberg’s use of a variety of philosophers, see his articles “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic”, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3 vols, trans. George H. Kehm and R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970–73), 1:161–74, and “Faith and Reason”, *ibid.*, 2:59–62.

29 Philip Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, in Braaten and Clayton (eds), *Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 133.

30 Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, p. 72.

31 Cornelius A. Buller, *The Unity of Nature and History in Pannenberg’s Theology* (Maryland: Littlefield Adams, 1996), p. 4.

32 Shults, *Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, p. 199.

of the outstanding minds in the history of modern thought, one whose work sets a high standard for us to follow. That is why I believe that theology after Hegel should strive to rise to his level of sophistication and rigour. But very few of my ideas did I actually get from Hegel – very few. I feel much more closely related and indebted to thinkers other than Hegel. His ideas, for example, are not as good as those of Wilhelm Dilthey, to whose assumptions in the area of hermeneutics I am indebted.”³³

It is, therefore, surprising to see that despite all of the above, Adams still claims, “The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg is strongly influenced by the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel.”³⁴ However, what potentially could cause greater concern, especially for Pannenberg, is Adams’ stark warning against the negative effects of theological adoption of philosophical teaching on the nature of time and history. For he believes that the philosophical teachings are not theologically neutral such that these accounts might be incorporated without having an impact on one’s theological positions elsewhere. Indeed, he argues that “the more systematic their theology is, the worse the effects of the secular philosophy on their accounts of other theological themes.”³⁵ If this claim is valid, insofar as Pannenberg draws heavily on a wide range of philosophers, Pannenberg must be one of the worst offenders, and as a result his theology must be unimaginably inconsistent and incoherent. To the contrary, Pannenberg’s theology enjoys a high reputation for its rigour and consistency, whether or not one accepts his arguments. He takes great pride in his goal of bringing all human knowledge together in our affirmation of God; that is, not merely philosophical input, but also, as already mentioned, contributions from biology, science, sociology, psychology, and so on. For Pannenberg, that is precisely what theology ought to target by engaging all human knowledge to articulate a relevant Christian interpretation of the whole of reality. Thus, we would argue that the theological adoption of philosophical or any other teaching in itself is not problematic. What causes concern is when one is not fully aware of the *baggage* that is implicitly taken on, as one builds a theological argument on a foreign premise, be it philosophical or belonging to one of the major theological figures.

Without further ado, the natural point of departure for our study is “the beginning”, namely human creation and the image of God, to which we shall now turn.

33 Gunther Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenbergs Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 294.

34 Nicholas Adams, “Eschatology Sacred and Profane: The Effects of Philosophy on Theology in Pannenberg, Rahner and Moltmann”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 2 (2000): 286.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 306.

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Chapter 2

Image of God as both Fount and Destiny of Humanity

“To many people nowadays it seems more obvious that men have made gods in their own image than that man is made to the image and likeness of a god.”¹ Pannenberg makes this comment in response to the rapid progress of science such that nature and society seem to have given up their mysteries, thereby wondering whether there is still any place left for divine powers. However, the truth of the matter is, “men are far from having achieved likeness to God”, according to Pannenberg.²

In his efforts to establish the principal interpretations of human existence and human destiny, Pannenberg expresses his dissatisfaction with the classical concepts of humans as created in the image of God and the primordial fall of Adam. He finds such ideas inadequate, insofar as they fail to elucidate the distinctively Christian understanding of humanity. In particular, they do not do full justice to the Christian conviction of the definitive importance of the salvation that appears in Jesus Christ. For these reasons, in this chapter we shall first discuss when and how the image of God is realised in humanity for Pannenberg, before examining what this divine image actually refers to. In so doing, the various theological and philosophical traditions on which he relies will be studied, and any divergence from them will be discussed. In particular, we shall be engaging Pannenberg in a dialogue not only with Herder, whose thought plays a pivotal role in forming and shaping Pannenberg’s concept of human destiny, but also indirectly with a number of historians and philosophers who are well renowned for researching Herder’s work. As a result, we should be better equipped to ascertain whether Pannenberg has used Herder as he should, and in the process we shall also be filling in the gaps that have been left by Pannenberg. We shall then move forward to present Pannenberg’s case that it is a communal destiny rather than an individual, isolated one. Finally, we are to argue that Pannenberg’s doctrine of human destiny is grounded on what we call *proleptic Christology*. Various specific aspects of his Christology relevant to our discussion will be highlighted and examined. However, it is by no means intended as a comprehensive discussion or critique of Pannenberg’s doctrine of Christology.

Overall, in his approach, Pannenberg appropriates his anthropology to move beyond merely empirical description of humanness and to speak of the image of God as human destiny, so as to arrive at an understanding of the Christian God as

1 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Man – the Image of God?”, in *Faith and Reality*, trans. John Maxwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 39. This essay was written in the early 1960s and published as *Der Mensch – ein Ebenbild Gottes?* in 1968.

2 Ibid., p. 40.

the Author and Finisher of the human world, which is the theme of God's economy of salvation from creation to eschatology. Thus, for Pannenberg, the doctrine of creation speaks not only of the existence of an independent world "at the outset", but also of God's providence over the historical process leading to its eschatological consummation. Only the eschatological future marks the answer to the question of the reality of God, the redemption of the world and the destiny of humanity, for the essence of all things is derived from the future consummation. For human creation, the image of God is precisely the link in this historical movement. The importance of the idea of the image of God to Pannenberg can also be seen from his statement, "The image of God ... is the destiny of every human", and this destiny "constitutes the *humanity and human dignity* of every human, even if he knows nothing of Jesus at all or finds the Christian proclamation and church repulsive" (emphasis mine).³

Before proceeding any further, it is important at this stage to clarify the meaning of the word "destiny". The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines "destiny" as "the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future", or "the event(s) that will necessarily happen to a particular person or thing in the future". However, this is not the meaning that Pannenberg tries to convey when he uses the German word *Bestimmung*, which has consistently been translated into "destiny" throughout his works. Confusingly, the word "destiny" is sometimes used as the English translation for the German word *Geschick*, which by contrast does carry a sense of fate. For example, the destiny/*Geschick* translation is used in "... of the coming, work, and destiny of Jesus" and in the following paragraph "... his work and destiny",⁴ as against the German original: "... des Auftretens, Wirkens und Geschickes Jesu" and "... seines Wirkens und Geschickes" respectively.⁵

Priebe, the translator of Pannenberg's first book on theological anthropology *What is Man?*, helpfully states in the Preface that destiny as *Bestimmung* "has the sense of 'definition' ... which defines or gives content to what man is as man. It expresses what God intends man to be."⁶ In other words, it is the goal of human creation. The end for which God creates human beings tells us what their destiny is. However, it is not a given state, nor something achievable by a single bound. Rather, it should be seen as referring to a direction in the process of human fulfilment, a historical process

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Die Auferstehung Jesu und die Zukunft des Menschen*, Eichstättter Hochschulreden, Band 10 (München: Minerva Publikation, 1978), p. 10.

4 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 2:442.

5 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988–93), 2:488.

6 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. vii. It is thus unfair for Jacqui A. Stewart in *Reconstructing Science and Theology in Postmodernity: Pannenberg, Ethics and the Human Sciences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) to critique that "there is an ambiguity in Pannenberg's development of the concept", accusing Pannenberg of "conflating two aspects or senses of destiny" – destiny as vocation and destiny as inevitable fate (p. 10). Perhaps Stewart has forgotten that the actual word used by Pannenberg is *Bestimmung* rather than "destiny", which does not suffer from the ambiguous meaning that is associated with the English translation.

through which alone human beings attain to selfhood and their specific essence, and which, as we shall see later, cannot be reduced to simply human action.

Actualisation of the Image of God

For Pannenberg, foundational to our understanding of the doctrine of the image of God is the question of the point of its actualisation. Pannenberg poses this question in his *Systematic Theology*: “When we inquire into this, unavoidably the question arises with which 1 Cor. 15:45f. does not deal, namely, that of the relation of the divine likeness that characterises Jesus Christ and is mediated through him to that which according to Gen. 1:26f. is a feature of all of us by creation.”⁷ In resolving the tension between the two, Pannenberg appeals to Irenaeus, Althaus, and particularly Herder, and declares that the image of God is realised not from the beginning but through the destiny of humanity, which lies yet in the future. This allows us to place the image of God in relation not only to creation, but also to redemption and eschatology. Though this point should be evident later in the chapter, it will become increasingly apparent as we progress over the course of the next few chapters. Let us now look into his arguments more closely.

In a move that deviates from the tradition following Irenaeus, Pannenberg supports the Reformation doctrine that sees *tselem* and *demuth* of Gen. 1:26 as equivalents. The term *tselem* refers to an idol or statue of God (cf. 2 Kings 11:18; Amos 5:26), while the related *demuth* is an abstract plural and means “likeness”. Modern exegesis generally believes that there is no discernible difference here. If the use of two terms is not simply a way of being emphatic, it would be that *demuth* limits to mere likeness the correspondence of the image to the original as it is present in the image, that is, “a precisely stating clarification of the concept of image.”⁸ The function of the image is, therefore, to depict the original that is represented.

The Reformers and the early Protestant theologians believe that the subsequent loss of the image is implied in the New Testament passage which mentions its renewal, in Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24. This suggests not only that the divine likeness of Adam includes the idea of an original righteousness, but also that the renewal is effected through Jesus Christ by way of a restoration of this original relationship with God. Since image and likeness are one and the same, both are deemed to have been lost as a result of sin. Indeed, the stronger the emphasis on our original perfection, the deeper the fall therefrom due to the first sin.

However, Pannenberg strongly opposes this view, and instead claims that there is no loss of the divine image through the fall: “The list of the generations from Adam to Noah in Gen. 5:1ff. repeats 1:26 and thus implies that the image is still true of Adam’s descendants.”⁹ Although Adam is said to have begot Seth “in his likeness” (5:3), the wording does not necessarily rule out the divine likeness. On the contrary,

7 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:208.

8 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen in der neueren Theologiegeschichte*, Heft 8 (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, München, 1979), p. 7.

9 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:214.

the reference to the likeness at the head of the list seems to suggest that it is passed on to posterity. Pannenberg draws support for this view from “the prohibition of murder in 9:6 on the basis of the divine likeness of each individual.” He continues, “In Paul, too, it would seem to be taken for granted that the likeness is a fact for his own generation (1 Cor. 11:7).”¹⁰

Secondly, Pannenberg argues that there is no real biblical basis for “a paradisaic perfection and integrity of human life before the fall in consequence of Adam’s original righteousness.”¹¹ Talk of a loss obviously presupposes a state prior to the loss, and Pannenberg questions whether such a state has ever existed. He points out that although the shortening of human life as a result of the first transgression (Gen. 3:16–19) presupposes a prior state in which this judgement did not apply, this does not necessarily indicate perfect knowledge and holiness or immortality before the fall. We shall have more to say on sin in the chapter dealing with it, but it should suffice to note here that Adam and Eve do not seem to have discovered the fruits of the tree of life *before* they become sinners. The second creation story also does not seem to presuppose that Adam possesses immortality. For Pannenberg, even God’s threat of death for eating the forbidden fruit does not necessarily imply that Adam would have been immortal, had he not transgressed. Rather, the threat is to the effect that he would die on the day of transgression, indicating an early death.¹² After all, the apostle Paul does not refer to Adam’s original immortality, but instead ascribes immortality only to the second eschatological man, who has been manifested in the resurrection of Jesus and whose life is permeated by the creative Spirit of life (1 Cor. 15:52ff.).

In the opinion of Pannenberg, the traditional dogma of a perfect first estate began to disintegrate in the wake of the emergence of biblical theology in the eighteenth century, as the dogma was submitted to the test of biblical theology. The development of an understanding of the Genesis narrative as a myth, which looks to a primordial past as the time when all currently valid orders and relations were established, also exacerbates the process of disintegration. This kind of orientation to a primordial time is contradicted even within the process of biblical tradition itself by the increasing importance assigned to history, and therefore to the future as the horizon for human fulfilment. For Pannenberg, “as a historical claim about the beginnings of human history, the idea that there was an original union of humankind with God which was lost through a fall into sin is incompatible with our currently available scientific knowledge about the historical beginnings of the race.”¹³ The fact that we fail to enjoy human perfection or righteousness with God as of today does not mean that it has been fulfilled at one time and that this fulfilment now lies behind us in an irretrievable past.

Instead, according to Pannenberg, the Pauline sayings that believers are to be transformed by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ, who is God’s image (2 Cor. 3:18, 4:4),

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 212.

12 Presumably, this dreadful threat subsequently gave way to grace, as he did not die immediately.

13 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 57.

must have in view not simply restoration of the image, but also a closeness to God that goes beyond the divine likeness grounded in creation. This, indeed, forms the biblical basis of Pannenberg's thesis that "the Christian doctrine of the divine likeness must see an elucidation of our general destiny of divine likeness."¹⁴ He therefore urges, "Christian theology must read the OT saying about our divine likeness in the light of the Pauline statements that call Jesus Christ the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; cf. Heb. 1:3) and that speak of the transforming of believers into this image (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18)."¹⁵

Among the theologians, Pannenberg claims support from, first of all, Irenaeus, who distinguished between Christ as original and Adam as copy of the divine likeness: "As Adam the copy was related to the original, the divine likeness acquired the meaning of a destiny, or goal, that would be achieved by way of assimilation to the original in the process of moral striving."¹⁶ This destiny has been attained only by the actual incarnation of the image itself in Jesus Christ. According to Pannenberg, we have to wait until Schleiermacher to recapture this theological insight that it is only in Christ that we see for the first time the completed creation of human nature.¹⁷ Paul Althaus, another theologian cited by Pannenberg, is more specific in holding to the conception of the image of God as the destiny of human beings that this essential destination of human beings to God is neither lost nor able to be lost.¹⁸

Above all, Pannenberg relies much more heavily on the interpretation of the metaphor of the image of God by an eighteenth-century scholar, Johann Gottfried Herder, who marks the beginning of modern philosophical anthropology, and who in the words of Zammito, a seasoned scholar on Herder, is one of the two major figures that "proved extraordinarily important for the emergence of empirical anthropology in the late eighteenth century in Germany ... for a generation it was they and not Kant to whom the discipline looked for orientation."¹⁹ Herder's major and, perhaps, most influential work, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*,²⁰ can be divided into three broad areas, according to Nisbet. In addition to physical anthropology and philosophical anthropology, "he [Herder] thirdly deals with that area in detail, which today is commonly known as ethnology (sometimes known as 'ethnography' in English), namely the comparative examination and classification of the peoples and cultures of the world in the past and present – an area which partly

14 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:210.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

18 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 59. See also p. 49, n.23.

19 John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 253.

20 For the purposes of our discussion in this chapter, references to the German text are made to *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band 6, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1989). The English translation is *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill (London, 1800). With the exception of one short passage, which seems to have been translated elegantly by Churchill, all other quotations are my own translation from the German text.

coincides with today's social anthropology."²¹ It is this third area that discusses Herder's idea of an "evolving image of God" in which Pannenberg is specifically interested.²² In particular, for Pannenberg *Ideen* provides an answer to the question, "how can this 'direction' or 'destiny' be understood as one to the human being from the beginning as inwardly his own, so much that it at the same time transcends the initial Dasein of human beings?"²³ Herder's idea of an image of God in human beings that becomes or develops sets him apart from the traditional view of the *imago Dei* as an original state of perfection. It also sets him apart from many other philosophers, as Pannenberg asserts: "Neither in the case of Jerusalem and Spalding, nor with Reimarus who a little later presents similar ideas, nor finally in the case of Kant and Fichte is the concept of human destiny connected with the theme of the image of God."²⁴ Herder's thought of human destiny is stated in a condensed way in the following passage:

No, benevolent God, thou didst not leave thy creature to murderous chance. To the brute thou gavest instinct; and on the mind of man didst thou impress thy image, religion and humanity: the outline of the statue lies there, deep in the block; but it cannot hew out, it cannot fashion itself. Tradition and learning, reason and experience, must do this; and thou hast supplied sufficient means.²⁵

This passage is so important to Pannenberg that he has carried out a close critical analysis of it, first more briefly in a journal article, "The Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology",²⁶ then in greater detail in an untranslated essay, "Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen", and finally in his book *Anthropology*.

To begin with, Pannenberg draws our attention that "Herder has indeed quite specifically taken the 'gaps and deficiencies' in the natural equipment of the human

21 H.B. Nisbet, "Herders Anthropologische Anschauungen in den Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit", in Jürgen Barkhoff und Eda Sagarra (eds), *Anthropologie und Literatur um 1800* (München: Iudicium, 1992), p. 2.

22 In fact, the idea of an "evolving image of God" was first conceived not by Herder, but by Marsilio Ficino, founder of Florentine Platonism, in his book *De religione Christiana* in 1476, where he interpreted the incarnation as the fulfilment of the human destiny.

23 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, pp. 4–5.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 18. In this respect, one must be careful not to overstate the difference between Herder and his teacher, Kant. In *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, Zammito argues that humanity (*Humanität*), one of Herder's key concepts on human destiny, does go back to the central concerns in Kant's moral-philosophical and anthropological ideas of the 1760s. In addition, Zammito turns to Dobbek, who claims, "the turn which his [Herder's] teacher himself once made toward the *humanioribus* became for him a call for ceaseless 'human cultivation' which from that point forward constituted the foundation and the impetus of his entire effort and work" (p. 141). Zammito also cites Haym, saying that "Herder's commitment to the *Bestimmung des Menschen* was not something developed after or against Kant, but out of Kant's own work and with his encouragement" (*ibid.*).

25 Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, IX, p. 256.

26 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology", trans. David Smith, *Concilium*, 6 (1973): 86–100.

being as the point of departure for his description of the human primal situation.”²⁷ For Herder, God has not abandoned human beings, leaving them no direction of life. Rather, in the case of human beings vis-à-vis animals, the deficiencies of their instincts are compensated by a divinely supplied direction and meaning for human life. Pannenberg explains, “The goal of this direction is now described by the concept of humanity [*Humanität*]. But, this goal at first only exists as ‘disposition.’”²⁸ This is consistent with Nisbet’s more elaborate interpretation: “Humanity includes, for Herder, a natural tendency to righteousness, to modesty, to monogamy, to gratitude and friendship and finally to religion. He calls it an ‘original predisposition of the human being’, and all deviations from that are for him only ‘results of tragic want, which at the same time never refutes the original sense of humanity.’”²⁹ Nisbet goes on to explain, “According to this definition, humanity seems to be a moral ideal, which was more or less realised in certain early societies, and which also still exists to varying degrees in all later cultures.”³⁰ This definition seems to be the one adopted by Pannenberg for his discussion of Herder’s idea of human destiny. However, Nisbet points out that in other contexts Herder defines “humanity in a second, more relativistic sense as the description for those typical characteristics, which the human beings show in their respective temporal and spatial situation. For example, he [Herder] says: ‘The purpose of humankind has to be what every single human therefore is and can be; and what is this? Humanity and happiness in this place, to this degree, as this and no other link in the chain of education, which reaches through the entire species.’”³¹

Hence, to be precise, *Humanität* is that which gives to individuals their humanness, and at the same time that which recalls individuals to their human destiny. In *Ideen*, Herder sums up his own objective: “I wished that I could put into the word humanity everything that I have thus far said on the noble education of the human being to reason and liberty, to finer senses and desires, to the most delicate yet strongest health, to the fulfilment and rule of the earth: for the human being does not have a more dignified word for his destiny than what expresses himself, in whom the image of the Creator of our earth lives imprinted as it could become apparent here.”³² Herder’s perception of *Humanität*, according to Knoll, is deeply rooted in history, embracing humanity in all its manifestations and in all ages, and encompassing the human potential latent in all individuals and in all societies. Knoll argues that this all-pervasiveness is deliberate on Herder’s part, for it allows him “in one concept to embrace the unending diversity of human situations, human endeavours and achievements, across the boundaries of space and time, free of normative value judgments.”³³ It needs to be “infinitely redefinable in order to comprehend the essence of the human

27 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 3.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

29 Nisbet, “Herders Anthropologische Anschauungen”, p. 22.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 Herder, *Ideen*, IV, p. 154.

33 Samson B. Knoll, “Herder’s Concept of *Humanität*”, in Wulf Koepke (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder, Innovator through the Ages* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), p. 9.

condition, everywhere.”³⁴ In other words, Herder avoids a narrow definition, for *Humanität* is meant to recall the human essence in all configurations, social or individual, beyond good or evil. It assumes the reality of the human condition, any time and any place. Ultimately, it is a manifestation, however obscured, of human essence.

Herder believes that God puts in the human heart a direction to be followed in the course of self-improvement, which takes the form of the image of God in humankind. Pannenberg puts it concisely: “As instinct guides the behaviour of the animals, so the image of God guides human beings.”³⁵ The image of God, which is impressed *on the mind* of humans, therefore constitutes the goal of human existence. Indeed, Pannenberg points out, “The connection of the ideas of the image of God and human destiny embraces, for Herder, the whole of human reality, the whole process of human history as a history of education to humanity.”³⁶ In other words, the image of God functions as a teleological concept, which indicates the disposition and standard for the education of the human race to a higher degree of reason and humanity. This argument is reinforced by Hamada’s assertion, “Humanity for Herder is not an abstract idea, nor a normative term, but humanity fits in real life. It is historically constituted in the concrete way of life of the human being every time and every place. Only in the concrete, temporally bound process of self-realisation of an individual human being – but also humankind as a whole – is what Herder calls humanity to be found ... Only in each concrete realisation of the vividness of the human being, in a self-realisation of the human being, does the image of God manifest itself reflexively.”³⁷

Thus, as understood by Herder, the image of God and the humanness of human beings belong together, and this explains the connection between *religion and humanity*, as for instance shown in Pannenberg’s quotation of Herder’s passage above. The connection between *religion and humanity* can also be seen in another light.

34 Ibid. Although Pannenberg has made no mention of the political dimension of *Humanität*, one must not overlook that for Herder, the primary concern of both religion and humanity is the condition of human beings in society. Through this concern, it becomes an integral part of his political thought: “Ultimately, the political mission of *Humanität* is to serve as a guide toward the achievement of social justice” (ibid., p. 13). The issues of freedom and liberty have assumed increased prominence in Herder’s later works, particularly in *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*, which according to Knoll was inspired by the outbreak of the French Revolution and was clearly motivated by political concerns: “*Humanität* here becomes a political imperative guiding the unremitting struggle for human freedom” (ibid., p. 12). For it alone can provide that ethical foundation without which government can never be made to serve humane ends. In *Briefe*, Herder launched his ardent attack against the “culture” of colonialism, and Knoll argues that this impassioned denunciation of conquest and colonialism points to a final purpose of *Humanität*: the achievement of universal peace. This leads him to conclude that “Herder’s concept of *Humanität* has decidedly revolutionary connotations; it was the sublimation of a political activism subdued but not silenced in the conservative climate of the Weimar Court” (ibid., p. 18).

35 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 45.

36 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 20.

37 Makoto Hamada, “Die Vielschichtigkeit der Begriffe ‘Bildung’ und ‘Bild’ in den *Ideen*”, in Regine Otto and John H. Zammito (eds), *Vom Selbstdenken: Aufklärung und Aufklärungskritik in Herders ‘Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit’* (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2001), p. 170.

As the multifaceted reality of human existence, humanity encompasses all human qualities and capabilities. However, as the goal of humankind, it represents human potentiality rather than actuality. It is the divine calling that summons human beings to rise above their state of nature. Religiosity is, therefore, inherent in humanity, and this argument pervades all of Herder's thought and writings. Chapter 6 in Book 4 of *Ideen* is titled "The Human Being is formed for Humanity and Religion". Further on in the text, Herder presents religion as "the highest humanity of humankind", adding, "the first and the last philosophy has always been religion." Indeed, Herder claims, "Nothing has ennobled our form and nature so much as religion", for it has led us back to our "purest destination."³⁸ Menze concludes concisely that "the entire chapter [6] on 'Humanität and Religion,' which concludes Book 4, is cast in the language of absolutes, abounding in certainties and superlatives, premised upon indisputable necessities."³⁹ Interestingly however, Herder does not use the term "Jesus Christ" or "second Adam" in the important passage cited by Pannenberg above, but puts in *religion and humanity* instead. This is precisely where the drawback of Herder's argument lies, which presumably prompts Pannenberg to supplement it with his own Christology, as we shall explain later in this chapter.

At this point, it is important to stress that what human beings possess initially is only *the outline of the statue*, as stated by Herder. As humans *cannot hew out or fashion* themselves, the education of the human species becomes the key, "for everyone becomes a human only by means of education."⁴⁰ Indeed, as early as in *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, Herder had already discussed a project of education, a project of the "universal history of the education of the world" (*Universalgeschichte der Bildung der Welt*). However, it is only in *Ideen* that this concept of the universal history of education is clearly brought out as the goal of his theoretical efforts. Here, education involves the practice of a whole life, with both the perfectibility and corruptibility of our species depending on it. As rightly interpreted by Adamsen, for Herder "humanity is not only something inner, but rather it completes itself in work, activity. With his Spinozistic–Leibniztic concept of power, Herder has to understand life completely as activity: if life is not an expression of the eternal work of the divinity, then there is no life."⁴¹

Instead of referring to the Holy Spirit, for Herder, *tradition and learning* as well as *reason and experience* all play a part in the educational process. *Tradition and learning* sum up the influence that we experience others as exercising on us, "for no one of us has become a human being by way of himself: the whole shape of his humanity is connected by a spiritual genesis, the education, with his parents, teachers and friends, with all the circumstances in the course of his life, thus with his countrymen and their forefathers, and finally with the whole chain of the

38 Herder, *Ideen*, IV, p. 163.

39 Ernest A. Menze, "Religion as the 'Yardstick of Reason' and the 'Primary Disposition of Humankind' in Herder's *Ideen*", in Otto and Zammito (eds), *Vom Selbstdenken*, p. 42.

40 Herder, *Ideen*, IX, p. 338.

41 Johannes Adamsen, "Die Theologische Grundfrage in Herders Aufklärungskritik", in Otto and Zammito (eds), *Vom Selbstdenken*, p. 55.

human race.”⁴² Nevertheless, human beings are not just passively exposed to external influences, but are stimulated by them to a process of self-formation. *Reason and experience*, therefore, function as the “organic powers” (*organische Kräfte*) in human beings, contributing to their education. Thus, the formation of the human being is left to himself and his fellows in the sense that human beings play a part in this process of self-formation. As Herder himself puts it, “The human being is thus an artificial machine, indeed gifted with genetic disposition and an abundance of life. But, the machine does not operate itself, and even the most capable human must learn how to operate it. Reason is an aggregate of observations and exercises of our soul; a sum of the education of our humankind.”⁴³

However, it is faith in divine providence that brings into unity *tradition and learning*, and *reason and experience*. As early as in his Preface to *Ideen*, Herder has already considered the importance of there being a divine plan at the root of human history,⁴⁴ with this divine plan traced by him in Book 4 beginning with the delineation of the God-given human capacity for reason. “Here,” Pannenberg argues, “Lessing’s idea of ‘education of humanity’ through divine providence fitted in with Herder’s intentions.”⁴⁵ The concept of divine providence through education is consistent with Herder’s other arguments, in that truth comes from God, but can appear to human beings only in human form; that is, it has to take a shape accessible to humans. Pannenberg continues to argue that divine providence “is immanent as well as transcendent to the human being, and is therefore able to ensure at the same time the inner unity in the mediation of his educational process through society and world experience.”⁴⁶ Only because divine providence is also at work, can those human factors contribute to the realisation of human destiny, thereby forming human beings for the goal to which they are destined and educating them to be the images of God. Interestingly, the connection between “education” and “image” is already given etymologically in the German words, *Bildung* and *Bild* respectively. Hamada suggests that the origin of the word *Bildung* lies in the Old High German terms *bilidôn* and *bildunga*, and in Latin *imago* and *forma*.⁴⁷ Their intricate relationship is brought out concisely by Hamada, when he says that in moving towards realisation, “just as the human being remains dependent on the work of the original image, the process of education precisely testifies this effect.”⁴⁸ He concludes, “Thus, only the concept of image can make Herder’s idea of education with all its complexity intelligible. But, this complexity is necessary in order to do justice to the complexity of human education in history.”⁴⁹

In other words, Herder is not denying any human involvement in the formation of human beings whatsoever; rather, he asserts that human factors are able to

42 Herder, *Ideen*, IX, p. 338.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

45 Pannenberg, *Gottesebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 6.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

47 Hamada, “Die Vielschichtigkeit der Begriffe ‘Bildung’ und ‘Bild’”, pp. 165–6.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

contribute to the realisation of human destiny only with faith in divine providence. Thus, his interpretation of the image of God becomes fully intelligible only in the context of faith in divine providence. On the significance of faith, Herder simply says, “The human being should not look into his future state, but rather should believe in it.”⁵⁰ Herder’s stance in relation to faith as a prerequisite to the attainment of truth is said by Menze to have remained unchanged to the end of his days.⁵¹ Thus, with faith, “whatever God’s purpose is with the human species on our earth remains unmistakable even in the most perplexing parts of its history”, according to Herder.⁵² However, one potential pitfall is that as Pannenberg refers to the image of God almost invariably as the human destiny, it is easy to overlook that for both Herder and Pannenberg, the image of God is already present in human beings in outline form by creation, thereby providing to human life a direction, though the definitive form of the image of God as the human destiny can be actualised only in another existence. This explains why Pannenberg defends that the image has not been lost through the fall, as presented earlier, and also Herder’s assertion that “we *are* really not yet men, but are daily *becoming* so.”⁵³

How the Image of God is to be Realised

Rather than speaking of the original state of perfection or the recapturing of the original righteousness lost through the fall, the focus of Pannenberg’s discussion of the image of God is firmly on the destiny of humanity. For Pannenberg, the question of the image of God is whether the image is different from the entire realm of existing beings in the world, or whether it is nothing more than an expression of the self-creative power of a human person as an “acting being”. In this respect, Pannenberg seems to agree with Herder that a human being cannot “carve” himself into the image, the outline of which is present in his heart. In other words, a human being is not seen as the active being “who transforms what is lacking in his original state by activity into advantages and thus creates himself.”⁵⁴ According to Pannenberg, the specifically social orientation of human individuals would cast doubt on them as at the same time the creators of their cultural world. Fundamentally speaking, Pannenberg contends, “The concept of action always presupposes a subject already completely formed. But human individuals in the incomplete state proper to the

50 Herder, *Ideen*, V, p. 197.

51 Menze, “Religion as the ‘Yardstick of Reason’”, p. 44.

52 Herder, *Ideen*, IX, p. 341.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 342.

54 Pannenberg, “Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology”, p. 90. On the contrary, Arnold Gehlen in his work *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1940) characterises a human person one-sidedly as an acting being who must create his own chances in life by his own doing, though surprisingly he is convinced that he is completely in the tradition of Herder. Pannenberg believes that Gehlen “has developed the approach not so much of his model, Herder, but of the early Fichte and of Nietzsche, as well as of American pragmatism. His treatment of language is set within that same framework”, *Anthropology*, p. 362.

newborn are not able to be acting subjects; they acquire this ability only through the process of ego development and self-becoming.”⁵⁵

In the opinion of Herder, as it is our specific character to be born almost without instinct, both the perfectibility and corruptibility of the human species have their basis in the plasticity of the human being. For Herder, the positive surmounting of this ambivalence is not simply a matter of moral action. His recourse to the concept of the image of God seems to be a rejection of the whole idea of human moral perfectibility through active self-enhancement, which is to be accomplished by human beings themselves. In this sense, he objects to the idea of self-perfecting. Notwithstanding the reality of the human lack of instinct, one must not base one’s self-fulfilment on one’s own actions and resources. As already mentioned, the formation of human beings cannot be achieved by themselves, but rather has to be grounded in external forces. These include *impressions* received, *reason* stimulated by *experience*, or *tradition and learning* gained through other humans. In short, a human person “has nothing of himself, but receives everything through imitation, instruction and practice, by which he is moulded like wax!”⁵⁶ Such external influences should activate an innate destination to humanness, ensured only by faith in divine providence that brings the manifold factors into harmony with the interior human disposition. In other words, in the harmonious contribution of these external varied influences to the realisation of humanity, human destiny is made possible only by the operation of divine providence, and thus by God himself. This leads to an important corollary of the evolving image of God concept: the image of God metaphor provides the foundation to Herder’s central argument that human beings are by their natural disposition interiorly ordered to the operation of divine providence. We shall see later how Pannenberg is to shape Herder’s thought with his own Christological ideas.

Nonetheless, Herder seems to succeed in expressing the human dependence on God’s grace in a new manner, thereby moving away from a purely moral description of human life. Pannenberg responds in agreement: “The goal for which human beings are destined is one they cannot reach by themselves. If they are to reach it, they must be raised above themselves, lifted above what they already are.”⁵⁷ Conversely, if they are able to accomplish their destiny by themselves, they would have to be already what they have still to become. That is why, for Herder, human beings remain dependent on divine providence in the process of fulfilling their destiny, though an active participation on their part is still called for, as it remains an essential factor in the complex of causes through which divine providence works. This participation takes place in interaction with their world and their fellow human beings, who, like them, are on the way to their own destiny. Indeed, the way of human beings to the divine reality in which they can ultimately ground their exocentric existence and therefore attain to their own identity is always mediated through the experience of the external world. This is especially true of the relationship with the other human beings, namely with beings whose lives are characterised by the same question and

55 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 162.

56 Herder, *Ideen*, IX, p. 342.

57 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 58.

experience. This takes us back to Herder's arguments, according to which human beings need to be educated to be themselves; that is, to reason, humanity and religion. Such education comes to them through their experience of their world and especially through dealings with other fellow human beings, for the theme of those other lives is or has already been the same as that of their own.

As argued, human beings do not realise themselves through self-enhancement by their own power. For Herder and Pannenberg, the concept of the image of God is predicated on the unfinished humanity of human beings. Nisbet points out, "the fact that the human beings can never completely develop their abilities in this life" means for Herder "the necessity of a future existence in which human abilities will develop further."⁵⁸ Nisbet also comments, "His [Herder's] frequent use of the word 'perfection' and related words shows that the origin of such ideas is from the metaphysics of Wolff and Baumgarten whereby perfection plays a central role as a teleological concept: the degree of perfection of a creature is, for Wolff, the extent to which it fulfills his individual purpose and the purpose of the world creator."⁵⁹ However, Herder goes beyond that. While the purpose of our existence on earth is the attainment of humanity (*Humanität*), few mortals are able to achieve this God-like humanity, which for Herder becomes "merely a preliminary exercise, the bud of a flower yet to grow."⁶⁰ "Either, therefore," Herder questions, "the Creator has erred in the purpose that he has put on us and in the organisation that he has so skillfully led together for the attainment of it, or this purpose goes beyond our present existence and the earth is only a *place of exercise, a site of preparation*."⁶¹ As Pannenberg writes in one of his earlier essays, "Man is not complete from the start as an image of God."⁶² In other words, the image of God is partly an original gift and partly the human destiny. Thus, one could argue that a human person is not born like God, but only becomes like him. Even so, Dupré makes an interesting point that "Beyond difference lies a more fundamental unity ... The creature's *Being* is not another, but God's own Being in a contracted mode ... The absolutely *one* tolerates no total otherness: it must include all otherness in itself. Hence what appears most other to the finite is, in fact, what is most identical. But if God remains so intimately present to creation, then that creation must, despite its unlikeness, in some way also reflect the hidden presence – not as a likeness but as a cipher."⁶³

For Herder, the human being "thus represents two worlds, and this makes the apparent duplicity of his being."⁶⁴ Additionally, "since for a sensual creature, the present is always more lively than distance and the visible has a more powerful effect

58 Nisbet, "Herders Anthropologische Anschauungen", p. 18.

59 Ibid.

60 Herder, *Ideen*, V, p. 187.

61 Ibid., p. 188.

62 Pannenberg, "Man – the Image of God?", p. 45.

63 Louis Dupré, "The Dissolution of the Union of Nature and Grace at the Dawn of the Modern Age", in Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (eds), *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 118.

64 Herder, *Ideen*, V, p. 194.

on it than the invisible, it is easy to see where the scale of both weights will tip to.”⁶⁵ Herder concludes, “Life is, therefore, a struggle, and the flower of pure, immortal humanity a crown won with hardship.”⁶⁶ This is because the human disposition for the divine image is not yet the true image of God, but only a potentiality for it. Something that tends towards the realisation of the purpose of creation exists in the being of the human person, namely a disposition pointing to the image of God. However, for Pannenberg this provides a solution to the tension discussed earlier between the Old Testament understanding of the image of God as present at the beginning of human creation and the New Testament declaration that only Jesus Christ is the image of God. This also differentiates human beings from other finite creatures who display only traces of the infinite and possess no resemblance to it. Among God’s creatures, we humans have the distinction of being related in a special way to God. Both our calling to rule over other creatures and our equipment for this task rest on this fact. Of course, all non-human creatures are also related to God as their Creator insofar as they owe their existence to him, and are continually referred to him for its preservation and development. That is why the world of creatures praises the Creator by its very existence. However, for us, the relation to God is an explicit theme insofar as we differentiate God from our existence and from everything finite. Worship and praise are a theme in the fulfilment of our lives. We are religious by nature. The fact that some human beings live without religion does not refute this fact. For Pannenberg, it is not fully clear what humanity is without religion, as he claims, “In our essential constitution as conscious beings, then, we are already destined to be religious.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the human religiosity in a way also relates to Jesus’ fellowship with God. Pannenberg asserts cogently, “If the human being in his inescapable being of referring to his divine origin and to his divine destiny is thematised, as both attain expression in the eventful history of religion as one of the phenomena specific to being human, then the fellowship with God for Jesus will no longer appear to the human as something universally strange and unusual.”⁶⁸

So, then, in what form does a human being relate to the divine image? To this end, Pannenberg first of all resorts to biblical exegesis to point out that in Gen. 1:26f. (also 5:1 and 9:6) we are said not simply to *be* the image of God, but to be *according to* the image of God. Implied here is a distinction between copy and original. We are the copy. Similarly, in Herder’s philosophy of history, the concept of image shows two dimensions – a universal perspective, with the meaning of the model or original (*Vor-* or *Urbildes*), and an individual perspective, with the meaning of the copy (*Nach-* or *Abbildes*). Of course, the image has to represent the original, though the likeness may be great or small. For Pannenberg, the theology of Irenaeus rightly allows for various degrees of likeness in that Irenaeus sees a certain likeness to God

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 194–5.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

67 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:292.

68 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christologie und Theologie”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21 (1975): 166.

in the first Adam, with the fullness of the original manifest only in Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ In other words, the image of God appears with full clarity only in Jesus Christ. This is compatible with the viewpoint of Herder and Pannenberg in the sense that the divine image is not achievable fully at the outset; rather, it is in a process of *becoming*. As Pannenberg reminds us of Herder's thought, "the human being indeed takes an active part in the process of his own education to humanity, but he cannot complete on his own the statue of the image laid in him."⁷⁰ The full actualisation of the image of God as our destiny was historically achieved with Jesus Christ, and we may participate in it by transformation into the image of Christ. We shall elaborate this point later in the chapter. At this stage, suffice it to say that humans are not fixed beings and that the image of God is unfinished in the metaphoric sense that it exists at the beginning only in a poor figure of clay, which has yet to be moulded. The historical process of human becoming links the whole theme to the idea of human destiny, though according to Pannenberg, "this is not an obvious link inasmuch as destiny relates to our definitive future, to the goal and end of our creation, whereas the divine likeness has to do with our original endowment as creatures."⁷¹

Pannenberg questions aptly, "If our creation in God's image means that we are to seek God, to honour him as God (that is, as the Creator and Lord of all things), and to thank him as the Author of life and of every good gift, then we may assume that there is a disposition to do so in every human life, no matter how little we see of it in a given case."⁷² Thus, he argues that our destiny to be in the image of God, grounded in the divine creative intention, cannot remain external to the actual living of our lives. Similarly, our destiny as God's purpose for us cannot be external to our creatureliness that it may be seen only in terms of the coming of Jesus Christ. Indeed, both Herder and Pannenberg are at pains to insist that a disposition for the image of God exists in the initial human natural state, and that the image must not be regarded as existing only in a realm beyond the natural human existence, while at the same time they emphasise repeatedly the dependence of the disposition, destiny and its fulfilment on God himself. In this connection, Pannenberg criticises Barth for rejecting all views that link this image with any quality and endowment of human beings themselves. Pannenberg claims that "in Barth's theology the externality of God's creative intention in relation to the 'phenomenon of the human' prevents the divine creative intention from showing itself ... as determining the entire range of natural human dispositions and existential conditions and thus as an *effective* creative action."⁷³ Hence, Barth's emphasis on the concealment of the divine creative intention implies that our creatureliness is not of itself oriented to God and to being

69 However, Pannenberg finds one aspect of Irenaeus' thought untenable on both exegetical and material grounds: Irenaeus makes a categorical distinction between image and likeness so that after transgressing, Adam could lose the likeness but nevertheless retain the image. See *Systematic Theology*, 2:216.

70 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 6.

71 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:218.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

73 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 60.

with God. Indeed, this in turn suggests that for Barth the divine image is somehow ontologically quarantined from current human existence.

Insofar as Pannenberg views the disposition for the image of God, and thus human destiny, as being bound up with human existence or ontologically inherent in it, it is not surprising that Pannenberg should find Barth so “externalistic” in this sense. In addition, the disposition for the image of God as existent in the being of the human person must be seen as constituted by the divine creative intention, for otherwise the intention would be deemed ineffectual, and hence, not as a true intention of God in his creative activity. According to Pannenberg, this would also lead to God’s failure in “giving form to his purpose in his work, or at least in setting this work in motion toward the appointed goal.”⁷⁴ He continues to defend passionately, “The purpose of the Creator cannot be as impotent or external as that in relation to the creature. We must think of the life of the creature as inwardly moved by its divine destiny.”⁷⁵ Of course, having the disposition for our destiny is one thing, and seeing its fulfilment is another. As already suggested, moving from a state of disposition to the actual realisation of the image of God is more than a task that we are to perform on our own, even though our active involvement in the process of our own history is required. Only God can cause the image of himself to shine in us. Thus, Pannenberg warns us that the moment we take our destiny into our own hands, we are already sinners and have missed the mark.⁷⁶

What Constitutes the Image of God

Our analysis thus far has not entered into any discussion concerning what the image of God exactly consists of. The classical understanding of the divine image in Christian theology tends to relate it to human reason or human soul. However, Pannenberg finds none of these classical attempts satisfactory. Irenaeus puts the idea of the image of God in the Platonic perspective. He then ascribes this image, in the sense of a copy of the divine original, to human nature, and connects it with the rational nature that sets human beings apart from the brute animals. According to Pannenberg, “Patristic thinking concerning the likeness to the trinitarian God to be found in differentiation within the human soul gave it a special turn in Western theology under the influence of Augustine. Latin Scholasticism gave particular emphasis to the fact that the likeness lies primarily in the soul.”⁷⁷ Pannenberg argues that this theological thought is not supported exegetically. The divine likeness as introduced in Gen. 1:26f. refers to the whole person, without any differentiation between body and soul nor localising the image in the soul.

Although Psalm 8 does not explicitly say this, the first creation narrative in Gen. 1:26f. derives our dominion over God’s creation from the fact that we are made according to the image of God. As representatives of God, this gives us the function of ruling over other earthly creatures. In this way, our human dominion is

74 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:227.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., p. 228.

77 Ibid., p. 206.

linked to God's own dominion, though as the image of God we are simply preparing the way for God's own dominion in the world. The plasticity of the thought finds expression also in the idea that the image of God lies in the upright stance, which visibly manifests our destiny of rule. However, Pannenberg rightly responds that if "the function of the divine image is to represent God's rule in his creation, we cannot simply equate the image and the function of rule. If the concept of the image is the basis (and limit) of the function, we must define the function as a consequence of the divine likeness."⁷⁸ In other words, if the image of God serves as a basis for our dominion, there must be a difference between them.

The discussion of the meaning of the creation story leads also to an interesting dialogue with Barth, who, according to Pannenberg, deduces that "humankind is the image of God in the plurality of co-human encounter in its basic form as the distinction and relation of male and female."⁷⁹ In short, the divine image consists of the relation between the sexes. Pannenberg finds Barth's exegesis questionable by drawing on other biblical scholars' works, according to which, except in Gen. 5:1 that repeats 1:27 word for word, there is no further mention of divine likeness and dual sexual nature together. Rather, the reference to the plurality of human beings as male and female is merely an addition to the statement that humankind is made in the image of God. Pannenberg furthers his criticism, "If we want to agree with Barth that the sexual relation corresponds to the trinitarian relation of the Father and the Son, then we must subordinate woman to man as Barth subordinates the Son to the Father."⁸⁰ However, this would contradict the sexual equality implied in the Genesis story, at least insofar as the divine likeness is concerned.

For Pannenberg, the image of God is fellowship with God. Or, as Wenz phrases it succinctly, "... the image of God as the destiny for fellowship with God is the creaturely destiny of every human in his being-person."⁸¹ Rather than relying on simply intuitive sense, Pannenberg appeals to scriptural justification for this link. He first argues that if the concept of human destiny is related to our creation in the image of God, this destiny cannot consist only of human reason or our dominion over the rest of God's creation. It has to relate, above all, to God's eternal being. Pannenberg claims support from the Wisdom of Solomon that the divine likeness should be seen as participation in God's glory and incorruptibility (2:23). The Wisdom book relates this participation to our endowment with wisdom at creation (9:2), and links immortality to righteousness (1:15). Pannenberg then infers that the image of God "means sharing in God's wisdom and righteousness, which also means fellowship with his incorruptible being."⁸² Thus, from what is originally meant to apply to only Abraham's offspring, the Jewish wisdom literature extends the idea of fellowship with God, which has its basis in the covenant with Abraham, to humanity as a whole. The point of likeness to God is fellowship with him. It follows that since our destiny

78 Ibid., pp. 203–4.

79 Ibid., p. 205.

80 Ibid., p. 206.

81 Gunther Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 137.

82 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:219.

is set with our creation in the divine image, as concluded previously, this means that we are destined for fellowship with God from the very outset as God's creatures.⁸³

In order to grasp the idea of fellowship with God as human destiny in more concrete terms, we must understand our present life in terms of this future destiny, which now manifests itself. In this respect, we can, perhaps, refer to the New Testament where Paul speaks of the manifestation of the image of God in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4), whose new and imperishable life has been manifested with his own resurrection. The image of Christ that we all are meant to bear (1 Cor. 15:49) is that of the Creator in the sense of the creation account in Gen. 1:26f., according to which we are now to be renewed or refashioned (Col. 3:10). As in Wis. 1:15, this includes righteousness (Eph. 4:24), which is the basis for the manifestation of new and incorruptible life in the resurrection of Jesus. Viewed in this light, the expectation of a resurrection of the dead can be seen as a conceptually appropriate expression for human destiny.

In Christianity, the death of the human ego is essential to fellowship with God, with the implicit assumption being that the natural ego is not yet the true self of the human being. The apostle Paul asserts that the only way to attain this special relation with God is to die with Christ in the hope of being raised together with him. Pannenberg explores the anthropological implications of this view by asking, "Does Paul not imply that only the new Adam reveals the true self of the human person, that is to say, the destiny of humanity as created in the image of God?", and in particular, "Who is the 'inmost self' of Rom. 7:22, the self that is said to take delight in the law of God?"⁸⁴ If it is the new Adam, then Romans 7 is about the struggle within the redeemed Christian. If modern exegesis is right that Paul in this chapter is referring to the conflict within a human person prior to conversion, the term "inmost self" still cannot be equated with the ego of the "natural man". Rather, Pannenberg articulates that "it is the human person as seen in the light of that person's destiny to salvation in Christ."⁸⁵ He continues to argue that "because of the saving love and promise of Christ offered to the sinner, it is our own self, the true identity of the person we were even before, now finally achieved, liberated not from some external bondage but from bondage to our old self."⁸⁶ In other words, in identifying with an alienated personal past, we suppose a hidden presence of the true self, even in the struggle of the old Adam, where there are traces of the presence of the true self now enjoyed, for they bear witness to the Christian identity that liberates the "inmost self" of the former person. Thus, the ego of the person one has been is both profoundly different from, and yet identical to, what one now considers oneself to be.

Similarly, the new man of God who appears in Jesus Christ does not replace the old man in that the first man disappears. All human beings are still born as the first man, but the new man grows in them by faith and baptism and by the working of the Spirit and the love of God. For Pannenberg, "the first man is only man insofar

83 In addition, when Pannenberg says that fellowship with God helps us to self-identity, to become free, this presupposes that we are destined by nature for fellowship with God.

84 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), p. 98.

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

as he is related to the man who is united with God, the man who he is destined to become.”⁸⁷ This is a fact that is not taken into account sufficiently by modern sciences, according to Pannenberg. The hope of participation in a new life is underwritten to believers by the fact that even now they put on the new man in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:53f.; Gal. 3:27), namely by righteousness and true holiness, by “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12f.). It is here that *an eschatological turn is given to fellowship with God* in that it is interpreted as their final destiny, which is manifested in Jesus Christ and in which believers share through the power of the Spirit, who is already effecting the eschatological reality of the new man in them.

Human Destiny as Common Destiny

In his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg claims that human destiny is not an isolated event: “Its aim is the incorporation of humanity into the kingdom of God. Thus the common destiny of fellowship with God underlies and governs human relations.”⁸⁸ This is, in a nutshell, the fundamental basis of Pannenberg’s thesis that far from being a matter of one’s private life, human destiny is a communal concept. However, Pannenberg has never systematically delineated his detailed justifications for it in a single piece of work; rather, they are scattered across a number of his earlier publications. Broadly speaking, the main reasons underlying his thought can be structured in the following way.

First, since the resurrection of the dead is regarded as the common future of all, this shows the communal character of human destiny. As Pannenberg puts it, “the resurrection of the dead will happen to all men collectively, not to each individual by himself. This expresses the fact that the individual man has his human existence only in community with others.”⁸⁹ In a subsequent article, Pannenberg elaborates, “The future of the individual beyond his or her death is not a private affair ... Ever since the belief in a resurrection of the dead developed in Jewish tradition after the Babylonian exile, that resurrection was expected as a common event, although the apocalyptic writers differed as to the number of individuals participating in that event (only the martyrs, a larger number of individuals, or all human persons) and as to its meaning (a preparation for receiving judgment or participation of the saved ones in eternal life).”⁹⁰ In other words, the unity of human destiny for all individuals expresses itself in the concept of the resurrection of the dead in that this event is expected as a universal fate that will involve all human beings. Even if the resurrection as a saving event does not happen to every person, it is still related to the unity of humanity, for it is connected with the idea of a universal judgement coming over all people at the end of history in which everyone will be measured in terms of the human destiny as such. Thus, individual eschatology, the central issue of which

87 Pannenberg, “Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology”, p. 93.

88 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:224.

89 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 51.

90 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 77 (1984): 125.

is the prospect of a life beyond death, and the collective destiny of the human race, which is to become manifest in the end of history, are inseparable.

Second, the human destiny to be the image of God is to be fulfilled in the reconciliation of the world through the coming of the Messiah. According to the Pauline teaching, Christ is the realised image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). He is as such not for himself alone, but “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:15, 18), in which the community of a human race that is renewed and united under the reign of God already makes its appearance in signs. Thus, Pannenberg says, “To that extent the image of God in human beings, when viewed from the standpoint of its realisation in Jesus Christ, has in fact a ‘societal structure’.”⁹¹

In addition, our common destiny can normally be gauged from a more or less common conscience, according to Pannenberg. The unity of human destiny manifests itself inwardly in human self-consciousness, whereas conscience is the way in which the unity of human destiny emerges as the standard for self-evaluation and for conduct. While it is conceivable that the conscience of an individual person can come into conflict with the society’s norm and customs, Pannenberg agrees with Nietzsche that “the individual’s conscience always bears a reference to the standards that prevail in the society”, for he believes that “the individual is inwardly tied to the prevailing morals and to the standards of behaviour in the society to which he belongs.”⁹² The content of conscience, therefore, varies from place to place as well as over time.

Meanwhile, our destiny drives human beings not only towards the unity of human existence and thereby towards the formation of a unified world, but also towards the unity of humanity. This prompts Pannenberg to state categorically, “That we speak not only of human individuals but also about *man* as such is justified only by the unity of human destiny in all men.”⁹³ We search for the truth only because the truth about God, the world and humanity can never be one’s own private concern, but is the concern of all. Even the fact that we speak about humankind and not about any particular individual can be justified only by reference to the common destiny of us all. Hence, an individual human person cannot attain his destiny for himself alone, without the others. He has to build the unity of the world together with others and for others. For Pannenberg, the relations between human beings are human relations only to the extent that each person allows the other to be a person. Thus, the other human is respected as a person if we respect that the same infinite destiny that is at work in ourselves is at work in him. Anyone who fails to respect and to help the other in his infinite destiny for God also jeopardizes his own destiny, which is one with that of the other in the infinite. Mutual respect is, indeed, the foundation of all true human relations, and love in its comprehensive sense as the well-wishing assistance rendered to one’s fellowman is the respect for one another. This explains why, elsewhere, Pannenberg asserts, “The responsibility of the Christian is, in short, to assist other

91 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 531.

92 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 87.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

persons (as opportunity permits) in their realisation of their human destiny, in their becoming human beings in the full sense of existing in the image of God.”⁹⁴

In a related argument, Pannenberg puts it plainly: “Men seek community. This shows that the destiny of all men is the same.”⁹⁵ We are searching for human destiny as something common to all individuals. It is not that each one has a specific destiny that is his or hers alone; rather, the destiny of all humans as humans is one, and thus we seek together for it and give it form. A human being does not realise himself through self-enhancement by his own power. Instead, he fulfils his destiny, which directs him beyond the world of finite things, by dealing with the things of his world which, as a world inhabited by society, is mediated to him through the social relations in which he lives. In one and the same community, individuals seek fulfilment of their own striving. While the paths of the individuals and their contributions are diverse in relation to one another, the goal for which they strive is very much common to all: the community that ties them together. By recognising one another exactly in their diversity and for that purpose creating new distinctions with a view to supplementing one another, they come together for the community of humanity and for the unity of human destiny. In this case, Pannenberg reasons, “unity takes place not in spite of their uniqueness but through their uniqueness.”⁹⁶ As a result, even our individuality is fulfilled in community. In particular, he comments, “The highest flowering of human community is achieved in the relationships characterised by coordination: from comradeship and free sociability to friendship and marriage. In all these forms of recognition, the individuals confirm the unity of their human destiny externally through their association with other individuals.”⁹⁷

Yet it is important not to overlook Pannenberg’s caution that community never forms the final configuration of human destiny, simply because there is no perfect community due to human sin. Sin brings the individual into conflict with community, and community with the individual. Worse still is the suppression of individuals by other individuals who, while they act in the name of society, mistake the inadequate form of their society for the final configuration of human destiny, or even pursue their own selfish interest in the name of the general interest. In an essay first published in 1963, Pannenberg concedes that the formation of concrete societies is only a provisional expression of human nature and destiny.⁹⁸ This provisionality arises primarily from their being specific and particular forms. While the external pressures that force individuals to form community should not be underestimated, they only provide the stimulus that leads people to join together for common efforts and should not be viewed as the exclusive cause of the formation of community. For Pannenberg, as our common destiny has not found any definitive expression, human conscience binds the individual to his society as well as impels him out beyond it.

94 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 35.

95 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 83.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

98 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “On the Theology of Law”, in *Ethics*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 23–56.

Nevertheless, the reality of human destiny forces us to live together in society, since individuals can comprehend and give form to their destiny only as something common to all. That is why Pannenberg contends that “wherever humans are caught up in the reality of God, they perceive their nature as something common to all, and each individual is impelled to express his community with his fellow humans. Only in such community, even though it is always only in a provisional form, can we live in the sight of God in accordance with our nature.”⁹⁹ This gives expression to the truth that the human destiny to be in fellowship with God cannot be realised apart from the community of human beings among themselves, just as the converse is true that the community of humans among themselves signifies the true fulfilment of human destiny only in connection with human openness to God.

In the light of the common destiny of humanity, to experience and to express the uniqueness of each person as related to one another is most desirable for an encounter between an I and a thou. The I and the thou are tied to one another through the love that directs each person beyond himself to community with others. Through love, they are passionately interested in one another without becoming enslaved or misused to one another. The loving devotion to the other person is inherent in one’s self, since we experience our destiny as being common. Indeed, love calls for more than mutual respect of individual identities. Genuine respect arising from love includes an ultimate sense of human solidarity with another person. One person’s possibilities for fulfilment in the presence of God cannot be completely foreign to another. Our hope is a common hope, and human destiny is the same for all humanity. Pannenberg argues that neither the present reality nor some mythical origin, “but the final destiny of man is free and equal.”¹⁰⁰ True love brings the loved person forwards along the path towards the particular fulfilment of his life. However, the loving person certainly will not model the thou according to his own conception. Rather, through the love that fulfils the other, the loving person himself is pulled out beyond his ego towards the human destiny along with the person he loves. Thus, the love that binds people together is not derived from themselves, but comes over them as the presence of their divine destiny. In other words, God’s power is at work in the encounter between human beings. Humans are persons only before God, and personal encounter only happens where the I and the thou are open for the reality of God. Community among human beings is made possible by the mutuality that is revealed in the relation between Jesus and his heavenly Father, and that is at work everywhere in God’s relation to his creation. For Pannenberg, this is possible in its full, conscious depth only on Christian ground. Indeed, the significance of the idea of community is most clearly summed up in his thought, “The correspondence between the image of God in human beings and the Trinitarian life of God is in fact fulfilled in the human community and specifically in the community of God’s kingdom.”¹⁰¹ This brings us back to what is set out at the beginning of this section about fulfilling the aim of the incorporation of humanity into the kingdom of God.

99 Ibid., p. 47.

100 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 121.

101 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 531.

This eschatological ideal, for Pannenberg, represents a final resolution of the antagonism between the individual and society or among individuals, as it is unlikely to be achieved under the current conditions of human history.¹⁰² Such a final elimination of all alienation would mean the realisation of our human destiny, that of the individual as well as that of society. It would, however, require that all individuals participate in it. Here, Pannenberg makes a great, biblical, claim: “A resurrection of the dead is necessary if all individuals of all times are to find their appropriate role in the perfect society of the kingdom of God ... If the social and the individual destinies of humans are interrelated, so that they can only be realised together, then it is necessary to have the total number of all human individuals present for human social destiny to be realised.”¹⁰³

Further Evaluation of Herder in Relation to Pannenberg

By now one might have asked, “What are the distinctive features, if any, of Pannenberg’s concept of human destiny?” Or, “Has he completely transplanted Herder’s ideas without modification into his own thought?” Indeed, to go back one step, the choice of Herder as opposed to other philosophers must be an interesting question in its own right. Without doubt, Pannenberg rates Herder highly, so much so that he commends Herder as having made “a fundamental and till today an effective contribution ... a contribution, which could represent an alternative to the emancipation model of the modern self-understanding of the human being.”¹⁰⁴ In contrast, Behler has his reservation, “Herder never advanced in Germany to the rank of a first-rate author. There was always something questionable about him, he always aroused the suspicion of deriving his ideas from some non-legitimate source.”¹⁰⁵ More specifically, according to Behler, Kant in his reviews of *Ideen* finds its initial parts containing strange speculation about the particular position of the earth among the other planets and the special organisation of the human being among different forms of organisation. Perhaps Kant’s dislike of Herder and *Ideen* is best summed up in Moser’s *Herder’s System of Metaphors in the Ideen*: Kant criticises that Herder does not follow the rules of philosophical discourse with sufficient rigour and austerity, and does not keep philosophy separate from other discourses, especially poetry. In particular, his greatest error is in “mixing-up” the realms of truth and beauty, for he thus invalidates whatever truth and cognitive values *Ideen* may contain. For Kant, the philosopher is supposed to reveal the naked truth, and not to cover it up or disguise

102 The expectation of the kingdom of God includes the conviction that only when God alone reigns, and no human any longer has political power over other fellow humans, will the rule of humans over other humans and the inevitable accompanying injustice come to an end, thereby fulfilling the social destiny of humankind.

103 Pannenberg, “The Future and the Unity of Mankind”, in *Ethics*, trans. Crimm, p. 188.

104 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 20.

105 Ernst Behler, “The Theory of Art is its own History: Herder and the Schlegel Brothers”, in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (ed.), *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference, Nov. 5–8, 1987, Stanford, California* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), p. 246.

it by subjecting it to the whole arsenal of devices which belong to poetry, such as synonyms, allegories, metaphors, imagery and mythological allusions.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps any scholar has his share of supporters and opponents. Koepke in the Preface to *Johann Gottfried Herder, Innovator through the Ages* raises an interesting point that we find particularly relevant to modern scholarship, in that he says Herder is “a major figure in many disciplines who is often mentioned, rarely quoted, and almost never read, although it is hard to understand the subsequent intellectual history without his contributions.”¹⁰⁷ This is precisely the reason why we have gone to great lengths to dig into Herder’s materials and related secondary literature in order to have a meaningful interaction with Pannenberg. Even so, we take Koepke’s view that the prevailing specialisation seems to preclude attempts to come to grips with Herder’s work as a whole. Any reviews of Herder’s work share a common deficiency that they substitute their partial perspective for the whole and ignore the other aspects of Herder’s work.¹⁰⁸

Barring this limitation and while it is beyond the scope of this chapter to launch a full-scale comparison between Herder and Pannenberg, we shall highlight, in addition to those already mentioned, a few significant similarities between them, which have shaped in a fundamental way their thoughts and ideas respectively. In so doing, one cannot help to begin to suspect that Herder’s influence on Pannenberg is more pervasive than initially thought and seems to go beyond the realm of human destiny. It would, indeed, be hard to imagine Pannenberg’s arguments without Herder’s contributions, particularly in respect of the renewal of the idea of the image of God – arguably the single most important concept of Pannenberg’s anthropology. Thus, it is bewildering, to say the least, that Overbeck fails to name Herder at all as one of the scholars who have influenced Pannenberg’s anthropology.¹⁰⁹

First, as with Pannenberg, Herder is a synthesist and, according to Zammito, believes the sources upon which anthropology draws should span all the genres, including novels, plays, history and physiology – anywhere an insight penetrated into the depths of the human soul.¹¹⁰ Herder’s aspiration to achieve his monumental synthesis is most vividly brought out in his earlier work, *Journal meiner Reiser im Jahr 1769*: “If I were worthy and able to be a philosopher, my book ought to

106 Walter Moser, “Herder’s System of Metaphors in the *Ideen*”, in Koepke (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder*, pp. 102–3.

107 Koepke, *Johann Gottfried Herder, Innovator through the Ages*, p. vii.

108 For instance, according to Koepke, “Lutheran theology has focused exclusively on Herder’s theological writings, not always with consent and agreement, while Germanists generally limited their attention to Herder’s endeavours as a literary critic, as a collector of folk-songs, and most importantly, as a mentor of Goethe” (ibid., p. 1).

109 Franz-Josef Overbeck writes, “Für die Näherbestimmung der Anthropologie Pannenburgs ist mit diesem Durchgang die Einsicht gewonnen, daß sein Konzept sich in seinen Grundintentionen Bausteinen der anthropologischen Philosophie Schelers, Gehlens und Plessners wie einer Auseinandersetzung mit Augustinus und Kierkegaard verdankt, und auch auf eher indirekte Weise mit Hegel in Verbindung steht”, *Der gottbezogene Mensch: Eine systematische Untersuchung zur Bestimmung des Menschen und zur “Selbstverwirklichung” Gottes in der Anthropologie und Trinitätstheologie Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), p. 135.

110 Zammito, *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology*, p. 314.

be about the human soul, full of observations and experiences! I wanted to write it as a human for humans: it should instruct and cultivate! It should contain the foundations of psychology, and after the development of the soul also ontology, cosmology, theology and physics! It should offer a living logic, aesthetic, historical science and theory of art! It should develop from every sense a fine art. And from every power of the soul a science arises. And from all this, a history of scholarship and science in general! And a history of the human soul in general, by ages and peoples! What a book!”¹¹¹ In other words, Herder seeks to bring all the modes of inquiry together into a “science of man”, into anthropology. This sounds strikingly similar to Pannenberg’s anthropological approach, which “turns its attention directly to the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology.”¹¹² For Pannenberg, “historical science”, as a study of the concrete reality of human life, precisely does the job of absorbing all these into itself as partial aspects.

Second, Koepke argues that despite Herder’s emphatic rhetoric with which he expresses his insights and convictions, Herder knows quite well how transitory and relative human knowledge is, as opposed to God’s eternal truth. This fundamental modesty, as reflected in his approach to the philosophy of history, coincides with Pannenberg’s thought. In *Revelation as History*, Pannenberg already claims that until the final demonstration of the truth of God occurs at the end of history – at the eschaton – all knowledge is provisional and subject to revision based on subsequent experience.¹¹³ He makes a similar comment in a 1962 essay: “Only the final outcome of all that occurs will finally reveal the true meaning of individual figures and events in the course of history.”¹¹⁴

Another similarity lies in their notion of God. According to Bunge, Herder believes that any language about God should point beyond itself, not simply to God in any form, but to God as the ground of being and as the active power that unites and orders existence.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Herder prefers to speak of God in terms of being (*Daseyn*) and in terms of a power (*Kraft*) that moves through all things. In this sense, God is the source of all being and the dynamic power that orders and unites it. This, again, is very close to Pannenberg’s view of God as “the all-determining reality” (*alles bestimmende Wirklichkeit*) in that God is in all things and all things are in God.

Notwithstanding such important similarities, Pannenberg as a major scholar in his own right does differ from Herder in many ways, and indeed does not agree to everything that Herder postulates. To begin with, he does criticise Herder for having underestimated the threat that evil represents for humankind. According to

111 J.G. Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band 9/2, *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, ed. Rainer Wisbert (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1997), pp. 33–4.

112 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 21.

113 Wolfhart Pannenberg *et al.*, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou and Edward Quinn (London/Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1969 [German ed., 1961]).

114 Pannenberg, “On the Theology of Law”, p. 44.

115 Marcia Bunge, “Human Language of the Divine: Herder on Ways of Speaking about God”, in Mueller-Vollmer (ed.), *Herder Today*, pp. 311–12.

Pannenberg, “Herder was ... a child of his time to the extent that he regarded evil in human beings as a disfiguration but not as a destructive contradiction of their very humanness itself.”¹¹⁶ In Chapter 4, we shall see that the radicality of human sin is very much part of Pannenberg’s theology. Herder also seems to have secularised the idea of the image of God by linking it with the human relation to the world. As discussed earlier, rather than referring to the Holy Spirit, Herder relies on the education of the human race in forming and fashioning humanity. This includes tradition and learning as well as reason and experience, which are to be gained through other human beings. In addition, Herder makes a much sharper distinction between dogmatics (*Lehrmeinungen*) and religion than Pannenberg would have done. Koepke points out that in *Die älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, Herder sees a dogma as an opinion over something that we do not or cannot know, and thus dogmatics advances reasons for the probability or plausibility of certain opinions, whereas religion is a matter of feeling (*Gemüths*), of the innermost consciousness. In this sense, dogmatics is a matter for philosophers and not for theologians. Koepke then argues that even Kant’s critical philosophy may be termed dogmatic, insofar as it deals with metaphysical questions, and that “Herder’s exegetic writings are ‘anti-dogmatic,’ for they try to pave a way to religion beyond dogma and thus mediate an experience of God’s revelation.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, unlike Pannenberg, Herder is at least to a certain extent in the tradition of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, insofar as he views the final human purpose as happiness (*Glückseligkeit* or *eudaimonia*) in addition to humanity, though Herder understands happiness as a state rather than an activity in the case of Aristotle.¹¹⁸

Perhaps the most crucial distinction between Herder and Pannenberg in the area of human destiny lies in the different assumptions about the “mechanism” behind the process of human becoming. While Herder understands the starting point of human history to be one of openness to a destiny not yet achieved, thereby rendering possible and preparing the way for the interpretation of the human being as a history, Herder leaves Christology completely out of the picture. He does not appeal to the idea, found in the apostle Paul and, following him, in the early Christian recapitulation theory of Irenaeus, that human beings attain to their fulfilment only in Jesus Christ and in fellowship with God that he brings about. That is why Pannenberg critiques, “the relation between anthropology and the philosophy of history remains ambivalent in Herder ... the philosophy of history is based entirely on general anthropology, with history being the development of those dispositions which make up human nature. In addition, human beings find their fulfilment not in history but only beyond it in a state of immortality.”¹¹⁹ Admittedly, however, even though Herder’s position is not Christocentric, it is definitely theocentric and not simply anthropocentric, as the

¹¹⁶ Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ Wulf Koepke, “Truth and Revelation. On Herder’s Theological Writings”, in Koepke (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder*, pp. 141–2.

¹¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of how far Herder is in the tradition of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Ulrike Zeuch, “Herders Begriff der Humanität: Aufgeklärt und aufklärend über seine Prämissen?”, in Otto and Zammito (eds), *Vom Selbstdenken*, pp. 187–98.

¹¹⁹ Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 501.

human being remains for him God's creature, not a self-contained being, creating as it were the world through its pure reason, but a creature created by God, endowed with God's spirit, whose cognition and reason is determined by perception and language.

For Herder, humans are not fixed beings, though he confines the element of self-determination by a reference to divine providence. In other words, he advances the more general thought of a direction of human history by divine providence, with humanity, and also immortality, as the goal. According to Dobbek, "Herder's Christianity ... breathes the cool, thin air of the Enlightenment", and "Jesus is for him in this sense first and above all the proclaimer of humanity", and not as the Saviour.¹²⁰ No wonder the essence of Herder's thought has been labelled by Ursula Cillien as "Christian Humanism" (*Christlicher Humanismus*) – an interpretation that suggests itself, for Herder, like the humanists of the Renaissance, is concerned predominantly with the ethical teachings of religion, and less with dogmatic theology. On the contrary, Pannenberg specifically relates our transformation into the image of God to the manifestation of Jesus Christ as the actualisation of the divine image. While this idea of Pannenberg has thus far been alluded to on several occasions, we are now to elaborate on it in much greater detail.

In particular, we are to argue that *Pannenberg attempts to ground Herder's anthropology on a Christological foundation in order to present a salvific, rather than a providential, account of the renewal of the imago Dei*, though Pannenberg himself has not explicitly said so. It is this difference that materially sets these two thinkers apart, rather than what Overbeck suggests: "Pannenberg wants to point beyond Herder that the religious and theological concept of the phenomenon of humanness is not external, as it appears to be the case with Herder, but 'corresponds to a dimension demonstrable in itself.'"¹²¹ At any rate, Herder's conception is unlikely to be particularly external, as it is based on the *interior* human disposition to the image of God, the "organic powers" (*organische Kräfte*) in human beings, and so on. For Pannenberg, instead of merely containing secondary reflections in the figure of Jesus of anthropological views with a different basis, asserts that Christology, or the history of Jesus Christ, contributes constitutively to general anthropology, "not by providing an entirely new point of departure, but by including within itself and thus transforming the already existing reality of man and his historical question about himself."¹²² This assertion would not be invalidated by Christology referring to the anthropological views given to it from other sources, unless Christology and history are considered as being discontinuous, in which case the incarnation could not have been a historical event.

Human Destiny based on Proleptic Christology

According to Pannenberg, in the second century the Old Testament view that God created human beings in his image and likeness was interpreted in the sense that

120 Wilhelm Dobbek, *J. G. Herders Humanitätsidee als Ausdruck seines Weltbildes und seiner Persönlichkeit* (Braunschweig: Georg Westermann, 1949), pp. 119 and 121.

121 Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch*, p. 126.

122 Pannenberg, "Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology", p. 87.

God bestowed his *logos* on humans, the same *logos* which was to appear fully and completely in Jesus. This means that only by Jesus is human destiny, the true humanity, fully realised. This is compatible with the New Testament teaching that only Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God. As God's image, Pannenberg says, "Jesus is the prototype of true human perfection, and every individual human being approaches his human destiny to the extent that his life is transformed into the likeness of the love of God revealed in Jesus' deeds, in order in that way to become truly human and truly free."¹²³ Hence, true humanity is seen and made possible to all humankind in the figure of Jesus Christ.

A human being has a history that is directed to the realisation of his destiny, to the fulfilment of true and perfect humanity in union with God. Pannenberg declares, "The goal of this history of man's becoming man has already appeared in Jesus, and this sets the theme for all subsequent history: all human beings are to come to share in the truly human character which appeared in him."¹²⁴ A human's being as a person is involved in this historical movement, which is exactly what Pannenberg defines as human nature.¹²⁵ Indeed, only the human being who is fully united with God brings his human essence to fulfilment. The fact that a human being is not truly human without his God is fully confirmed by the Christian faith in the perfect union of God with Jesus as a human being. Through this human, God has also united himself with humanity as a whole, since by his unity with God this one human being has manifested true human perfection, the humanity of a human being as such. This brings new dynamism to the idea of human solidarity with God, his image of God.

However, Christology is much more than simply an ideal interpretation of perfect humanity. Any view of humanity is guaranteed not by human existence, but only by the history of one man, Jesus of Nazareth. According to Pannenberg, in the particular event of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the true destiny of humanity is revealed, and only in relation to that event do human beings achieve their final destiny. In other words, the destiny is not in a human being already; rather, it can be found only beyond him in God and in the new Adam, the man who is united with God. To put it more elegantly, the image of God as the destiny of humanity is completed by, and proleptically present in, Jesus Christ. This is the most central and distinct theological claim of Pannenberg's concept of human destiny, and forms the basis for his theological anthropology. To this extent, we deem it justifiable to describe his idea of human destiny as one that is based on *proleptic Christology*.

Before elaborating in what specific sense Pannenberg's Christology is proleptic, we first have to address a fundamental question of whether the Christology that underpins Pannenberg's doctrine of *imago Dei* is sufficiently soteriological. After all, this is meant to be the particular aspect that sets him apart from Herder. However, one must not confuse this question with another, albeit hotly debated, issue, which is concerned with whether Christology is to be constructed out of soteriology, or vice versa. In this connection, suffice it to say that apparently in the face of

123 Pannenberg, "Man – the Image of God?", pp. 48–9.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

125 Pannenberg defines, "human nature *is* the history of the realisation of human destiny." See *Human Nature, Election, and History*, p. 24.

Feuerbach's challenge to theology, Pannenberg is adamant that Christology must precede soteriology, for fear of the projections of human desires and needs onto the figure of Jesus.¹²⁶ For our purposes, it is important to realise that Pannenberg stresses the integral connection between affirmations concerning Jesus the man and his universal human significance. Indeed, "a separation between Christology and soteriology is not possible, because in general the soteriological interest, the interest in salvation, in the *beneficia Christi*, is what causes us to ask about the figure of Jesus."¹²⁷ While McGrath rightly points out that "our experience of Christ is prior to our recognition of the identity of the source of this experience",¹²⁸ Pannenberg might defend that Christology does not have to follow this experiential or epistemological order. He could legitimately ask, "Has one really spoken there about Jesus himself at all?"¹²⁹ More particularly, how can one know that what one experiences is actually the salvation of God? For Pannenberg, Jesus possesses significance for us only to the extent that this significance is inherent in himself, in his history, and in his person constituted by this history. Only when this is shown, can we be sure that we are not merely attaching our longings and thoughts to the figure of Jesus. Hence, the question about Jesus himself, about his person (that is, Christology) must remain prior to all questions about his significance, to soteriology. Or else, faith in salvation itself would lose any real foundation.

Pannenberg puts it incisively: "Almost all Christological conceptions have had soteriological motifs."¹³⁰ Jesus' saving work is the purpose of his being sent into the world. Indeed, according to Pannenberg, "the Father does not act alone in the offering up of Jesus to death. Jesus himself is not simply passive in this action, for the Son is also acting subject in the event. As such, he is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14)."¹³¹ By linking to the death of Jesus, which takes place in baptism (Rom. 6:3f.; Col. 2:12), we have the possibility in our deaths of attaining to the hope of participating in the new resurrection life that has already become manifest in Jesus (Rom. 6:5). Recipients of the expiatory working of the death of Jesus may, therefore, have confidence that their own deaths will not result in definitive exclusion from God and his life. Only then does the expiation, which the death of Jesus makes possible,

126 The critique against theology/religion launched by Ludwig Feuerbach and his followers can be summarised briefly in the view of humanity's creating God by projecting its own nature and aspiration onto an imaginary transcendent plane. For Feuerbach, the notion of God is only a hypostatisation of humanity's deepest being, as characterised by its aspiration and craving. There are no attributes of God that cannot be conceived as those of human beings. In other words, the very concept of God, and all that is implied by it, has its origins within humanity itself. Hence, God is nothing more than the idealised amalgamation of human aspirations and cravings. To that extent, salvation, for instance, is nothing but the projection of human longing for deliverance and immortality.

127 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 47.

128 Alister McGrath, "Christology and Soteriology: A Response to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Critique of the Soteriological Approach to Christology", *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 42 (1986): 232.

129 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 47.

130 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

131 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:441.

actually come into force for humans. The death of Jesus has expiatory efficacy for individual sinners, as they for their part link their own deaths to the death of Christ, which has become the transition to the new life of the resurrection of the dead.

We shall say a great deal more about its meaning and significance later, but for the time being we would like to highlight *the specific saving character of the hope in the resurrection* as postulated in Pannenberg's doctrine of human destiny. Pannenberg argues, "The understanding of the future resurrection as the content of salvation is already to be found in the oldest Biblical witness to this hope, Isa. 26:7 ff. Through the authoritative word of God in ch. 26:19 the righteous are promised that Yahweh will provide salvation for them through resurrection from death."¹³² He continues, "Paul only speaks of resurrection with a view to believers. Thus, the resurrection as such already has saving character. Perhaps the same is to be affirmed about Jesus, for in his discussion with the Sadducees ... (Mark 12:26f.) he justifies the hope of resurrection from the fact that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God of the living, not of the dead."¹³³ Moreover, in the Last Judgement (Matt. 25:31–46), all the nations will be assembled before the Son of Man, who will make the separation between them. Thus, Pannenberg, putting himself firmly in the Pauline tradition, does not speak here of the resurrection of all human beings in general. Those whom are to be damned in the judgement will by no means receive bodies of glory. For Pannenberg, Paul never speaks a double resurrection to salvation *and* to damnation. To be sure, 2 Cor. 5:10 says that all "must appear before the judgement seat of Christ", but that as such does not necessarily mean a preceding resurrection for all. Thus, for Pannenberg, it "is clearly evident in Paul, the expectation of the resurrection is itself already the hope of salvation."¹³⁴ This enables Pannenberg to link the anticipated salvation with *this* life and at the same time to avoid seeing salvation as the gift of *another* life. In contrast, if the resurrection is treated as being subordinated to the more general idea of a universal resurrection of the dead, then expectation of resurrection loses its character as hope of salvation and takes second place to the thought of judgement. In short, for Pannenberg, the resurrection from death means the blessing of salvation in that resurrection is imparted only to the just, indicating that it is a share in salvation, while the wicked receive their punishment without resurrection. In other words, for believers, resurrection and salvation form a single event. The resurrection as such means participation already in the salvation of eternal life. It is the object of Christian hope. Pannenberg argues, "The dominant NT view of resurrection as participation in the saving blessing of life means that we can speak only of an anticipation of the future event in the life of faith, and that we can do so on the basis of the participation of believers in Jesus Christ in whose resurrection this anticipation has become an event."¹³⁵ This way of interpreting resurrection, however, attracts its share of criticism.

132 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 79.

133 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

134 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 103. Here, one can see that Pannenberg from the outset has taken an exegetical decision to accept unreservedly the kerygmatic formulae found in the Pauline trajectory to the exclusion of other New Testament accounts of resurrection.

135 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:578, n.172.

Bridges, siding with Henri Blocher, critiques, “Resurrection, in the New Testament, does not show the hard-and-fast contours of a systematized dogma, even in Paul.”¹³⁶ For he believes that “Pannenberg’s ‘compression’ of the multivalency of resurrection language into systematic doctrine deprives resurrection somewhat of its elasticity in reflection and usage.”¹³⁷

The connection that Pannenberg delineates between Christology and soteriology forms the context for his doctrine of reconciliation, which, he declares, describes Jesus’ death as the anticipation of the subsequent reconciliation of the world. Pannenberg claims that “it is finally the idea of reconciliation in Christ that constitutes the distinctively Christian perspective of human existence.”¹³⁸ Overbeck rightly sees in Pannenberg’s thought, “In this event of reconciliation God can be understood as the acting subject in relation to the unique historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and any idea of an event that takes place only in the subjectivity of the believers can be rejected.”¹³⁹ However, views regarding God as the Reconciler who brings salvation to humanity would not be true without their correlate – saved and reconciled humanity. In other words, for reconciliation to be effective, the other side has to agree, “so the expiation grounded in Christ’s vicarious death needs appropriation by confession, baptism, and faith on the part of each individual.”¹⁴⁰ Hence, only as one’s own death is linked to that of Christ, can death no longer mean separation from God. More specifically, the death of Jesus means that we no longer have to see ourselves as excluded from fellowship with God and thus as enemies of God. He opens up access for us so that in accepting our own finitude like him, and in fellowship with him, we come to share in life from God and can already live this earthly life assured of the eternal fellowship with God that overcomes the limitation of death.

For Pannenberg, though, the task of completing the reconciliation won in Jesus’ death is relegated to the Spirit.¹⁴¹ “Through the Spirit reconciliation with God no longer comes upon us solely from outside. We ourselves enter into it.”¹⁴² Indeed, Pannenberg equates the work of the exalted Christ with that of the Spirit in us as different aspects of one and the same divine action for the reconciliation of the world. That is why, in agreement with the apostle Paul, he asserts that “to walk in

136 James T. Bridges, *Human Destiny and Resurrection in Pannenberg and Rahner* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 181.

137 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

138 Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*, p. 14.

139 Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch*, p. 305.

140 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:428.

141 Here is an example where, moving away from the Christocentric characteristic of his monograph *Jesus – God and Man*, Pannenberg in the dogmatics places his delineation of Christology firmly in relation to the doctrine of God. Although Christology may lie at the heart of his theology, for Pannenberg the centre of theology is clearly the doctrine of God, more specifically the doctrine of the Trinity. In the “Postscript to the Fifth German Edition” of *Jesus – God and Man* (1976), Pannenberg admits that it is a limitation for “the history of tradition approach ‘from below’ ... [to treat] the reality of God as a *presupposition* of Christology”, reprinted in *Jesus – God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 2002), p. 466.

142 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:450.

the Spirit” and “to put on Christ” are materially one and the same. He continues, “The Spirit effects righteousness in us by creating faith in the messages of Christ ... By the Spirit, God’s reconciling that took place in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is actualised in recipients, in those who had to be reconciled.”¹⁴³ As the Spirit brings humans to acknowledge the glory of Jesus as the Son, their reconciliation with the Father is completed.

Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation points also to ecclesiology and eschatology, as the work of the Spirit moves beyond individual human beings to encompass the common character of human destiny. His understanding of this destiny has a present aspect in that the future of the kingdom of God is present in the church in the form of a sign. For the reconciliation of the world finds its completion only in the future kingdom and in the resurrection of the dead, at which point the provisionality of the present is overcome. Through the Spirit, the crucified and exalted One comes to lordship, and thus the lordship of the Father, the kingdom of God, is realised. In Chapter 5, we shall study how Pannenberg’s theology of the kingdom of God is relevant to his thought of human destiny. In the meantime, we are to dig deeper into the “Christological foundation” that underpins the latter.

Commenting on “a wholeness of meaning which is not yet realised in all the relationships of meaning within that reality”, Pannenberg suggests that “this anticipatory wholeness of meaning, be it obscure or pellucid, is to be found in the experience of the significant particular.”¹⁴⁴ For Pannenberg, this significant particular is Jesus Christ, in whom the whole of meaning and reality is anticipated, and only through whom can human beings realise their true destiny. More specifically, it is in Jesus’ Sonship that the destiny which has stood over human beings and which is intended from all eternity to become his future is fulfilled. Precisely in his Sonship, in his relation to the Father, all other humans are to receive a share through him. God has sent his Son so that we may receive sonship through him. As we are sons of God through Jesus, God has also sent the Spirit of sonship into our heart through which we say, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:5f.; cf. Rom. 8:15). The new man lives on the basis of the new relation to God, on the basis of the communion with God, as the Father that is opened up through Jesus. The openness to God, which characterises Jesus’ humanity in his dedication to the Father and shows him to be the Son, constitutes his personal identity with the Son. As we shall see in the next chapter, openness to God is the radical meaning of that human “openness to the world”, which constitutes human’s specific essence in distinction from other creatures.

If the human being in his existence is the question about God as the supporting and reconciling origin of everything real, then the unity with God that the Christian community confesses about Jesus would not be incompatible with human essence as such. In his personal unity with God, Jesus is then the fulfilment of human destiny. It is thus misleading, to say the least, for Pannenberg to claim in an earlier essay, “A radical change in man’s *understanding* of himself was introduced by the coming

143 Ibid., p. 451.

144 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christian Theology and Philosophical Criticism”, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3 vols, trans. George H. Kehm and R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970–73), 3:133.

of Christ”¹⁴⁵ (emphasis mine). Interestingly, Grenz makes exactly the same point in his reading of Pannenberg’s texts that “as the second Adam, Jesus transforms the *understanding* of humanity”¹⁴⁶ (emphasis mine). But if the change or transformation takes place merely at the level of understanding, this means that everything has already been effected at the very outset by the “all-determining reality”, and what is at issue is only epistemological. In other words, it is only *our* knowledge that has gained. However, we would argue that as revealed in the presentation of Pannenberg’s viewpoints so far, the coming of Jesus Christ actually inaugurates the process that human beings are to be renewed and their destiny fulfilled. Thus, Jesus transforms the humanity ontologically rather than merely epistemologically, and only on that basis can we regard *Pannenberg’s proleptic Christology as the completion of anthropology*.

So, what do we mean by prolepsis? Or, in what way is Pannenberg’s Christology proleptic? While the concept of anticipation lies at the heart of Pannenberg’s theology and influences the formulation of many of his theological ideas, it is perhaps through his Christology that the concept finds its base and develops its depth. For instance, as early as 1961, when his doctrine of revelation was first published in German, he had already conceptualised that “in the fate of Jesus, the end of history is experienced in advance as an anticipation.”¹⁴⁷ Even more precise is his statement that “in the fate of Jesus Christ the end is not only seen ahead of time, but is experienced by means of a foretaste. For, in him, the resurrection of the dead has already taken place, though to all other men this is still something yet to be experienced.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, with Jesus the end is not only seen in advance, but it has happened in advance. This represents the profound difference between Jesus and the apocalyptic prophets. In Jesus’ activity, eschatological salvation has already made its appearance; that is, not the expectation of the ultimate salvation, but rather salvation itself was present.

Hence, even though Jesus erred when he announced that God’s lordship would come in his own generation, Jesus’ imminent expectation has not remained unfulfilled. For it has been fulfilled by himself in the sense that the eschatological reality of the resurrection of the dead has appeared in Jesus himself. True, it is not yet universally fulfilled in the way in which Jesus and his followers have previously expected. Nevertheless, Jesus’ resurrection justifies the imminent expectation that has moved him, and establishes anew the eschatological expectation fulfilled in him for the rest of humanity. As long as the expectation of the coming kingdom of God remains, we would still be within the framework of Jesus’ message. The imminent expectation of the eschatological events is not only inaccessible for us,¹⁴⁹ but it has become superfluous for all who come after him through Jesus’ resurrection. The nearness of God, his salvation and his judgement are eternally guaranteed by Jesus, for his imminent expectation has been fulfilled in him. Thus, since Jesus, humanity has

145 Pannenberg, “Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology”, p. 88.

146 Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, p. 107.

147 Pannenberg *et al.*, *Revelation as History*, p. 134.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 141; cf. pp. 142, 144 and 199.

149 For such expectation constitutes the particular characteristic of Jesus’ time and thus cannot arise in our contemporary situation.

been freed from the question of when the end will come. Having said that, humanity still lives unto the end, Christians continue to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God, and the future of the final consummation is still constitutive for faith in Jesus Christ. Without such expectation, Jesus' message and the meaning of his fate would not be understandable for us. However, the Christian Easter message will be contested as long as the general resurrection of the dead and the Parousia are still in the future. Pannenberg insists that "for its final verification, the Christian message of the resurrection of Jesus needs the event of an eschatological resurrection of the dead. The enacting of this event is one of the conditions, if not the only condition, on which to maintain the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Maintaining this truth implies a view of reality that rests on the anticipating of a fulfilment of human life and history that has not yet taken place."¹⁵⁰

It should already be obvious that by *prolepsis*, we do not mean merely hope. In other words, we do not simply hope for a possible future outcome. Instead, the future is in some way present in the present so that it proleptically determines and defines meaning to that present.¹⁵¹ Prolepsis is, therefore, *deterministic* anticipation. McDermott calls it the "prehappening in one man of that which is, through his mediation, the destiny of all."¹⁵² As Pannenberg puts it, "the truth claim that is inherent in the Christian affirmation that the God whose kingdom is still to come has been revealed definitively in the history and person of Jesus."¹⁵³ We are meant to be "in rational confidence of a future success, a confidence inspiring the attitude of the present moment."¹⁵⁴ In addition, the tension between present and future in Jesus' proclamation makes the proleptic character of Jesus' claim apparent – Jesus' claim means an anticipation of a confirmation that is to be expected only from the future. This is manifested in one of Jesus' sayings, which has major importance in his word about the correspondence of the future judgement to the present attitude of people in relation to Jesus: "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8). Thus, Pannenberg sums up that "the anticipation of the future verdict ... is the proleptic structure of Jesus' claim."¹⁵⁵ The ultimate unveiling in the coming judgement is decided in advance by the relationship of Jesus to the human being and his relationship to Jesus. This again shows that Jesus is not just an exemplar for Christians. For Pannenberg, if our destiny as the image of God has found its fulfilment, proleptically as regards all other human beings, in the fellowship of God and man in Jesus Christ, then our creation in the divine image must be related from the very outset to this fulfilment that has come, or broken, in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. Put in another way, if our creation in the divine image implies our destiny of fellowship with the eternal

150 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:350–51.

151 See Chapter 1 for Pannenberg's theology of the future.

152 Brian McDermott, "Pannenberg's Resurrection Christology: A Critique", *Theological Studies*, 35 (1974): 714.

153 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Response to My American Friends", in Braaten and Clayton (eds), *Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 320.

154 Pannenberg, "Christian Theology and Philosophical Criticism", p. 139.

155 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 60.

God, the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is not only the proleptic revelation of salvation amid unfinished world history; it is the fulfilment of human destiny.

The union of God and humanity in the life of a man obviously cannot be surpassed by any other form of fellowship between God and us. Indeed, not all creatures in their own uniqueness achieve the full structure of the relation of the Son to the Father, which cannot be transcended by any other form of relation to God. Only through Christ is this special destiny achievable for all human beings. For Pannenberg, only in the light of the incarnation of the eternal Son as a man, is the relation of creatures to the Creator able to find its supreme and final realisation in humanity. As already mentioned, our creaturely reality is characterised from the very first by a reference to God and the fellowship with him that is actualised in Jesus Christ. He mediates all temporal events as their ultimate goal and reason. At the same time, the participation of created nature in Christ's perfect humanity implies that God is in all things and all things are in God. One could even argue that human essence is divinised to a point where it no longer exists in itself, but in oneness with the infinite. In it, God achieves his most perfect work – that which enables him personally to inhabit creation. Pannenberg rightly points out, "If the God of redemption who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the same as the Creator of the world and the human race, then we must view his saving work as an expression of his faithfulness to his creative work."¹⁵⁶ We may also add that the appearance of Jesus Christ, therefore, has to be seen as the completion of creation. As the eternal Son assumes human form, and through him makes acceptance as children of God accessible to all other human beings, the relation of human creature to the Creator finds in principle the highest fulfilment that we can possibly imagine. The incarnation of the Son is not just a supernatural event, external to our beings as humans. Our destiny for fellowship with God, which finds its definitive realisation in the incarnation of the Son, means that humanity as such, and each individual within it, is lifted above the natural world and even also above the social relations in which we exist. In the incarnation of the Son, creaturely existence in its distinction from God, but also in its destiny of fellowship with him, comes to fulfilment, or, more precisely, to a proleptic fulfilment. By speaking about the lordship of God as a future reality yet with power to determine the present, Jesus becomes the mediator of the presence of God's lordship to those who accept his message and who thereby receive God's available forgiveness as well.

The question that one might ask by now, if not earlier, is, "On what basis can Pannenberg say that human beings realise their destiny only *in* or *through* Jesus Christ?" More specifically, what constitutes *in* or *through*? How does Pannenberg justify the eschatological significance of Jesus Christ not only for the Jews, but also for every human being? In other words, how does he understand the relation between Jesus and other humans? Or, to put the same question in a different way, Clark asks that if human life cannot be fulfilled individually, then "how can Pannenberg hold that Jesus found his true fate and divinity and became the guarantor of a similar fate for all humans through his resurrection?"¹⁵⁷ Pannenberg's viewpoint is clearly a very

156 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:97.

157 W. Royce Clark, "Christian Images of Fulfillment: Healing within Anticipation", *Religion in Life*, 46 (1977): 194.

great claim, so much so that a particular historical event around two thousand years ago is claimed to have universal human validity. The delay of the end events, however, must not be seen as a refutation of the Christian hope and of the Christian perception of revelation as long as the unity is maintained between what has happened in Jesus and the eschatological future. Along more or less the same line, Nicol in a 1976 essay attempts to provide an answer, “In the terms of late-Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic the resurrection was understood as the event marking the irruption of the end of the world. Therefore that which has occurred in one specific instance with regard to Jesus of Nazareth is the sign that this same ultimate destiny is the destiny reserved for history as a whole ... It is this event which unites and reconciles all other events to the whole. It is the key to the meaning of universal history.”¹⁵⁸ While Nicol’s interpretation is correct and representative of Pannenberg’s thought, it is far from complete. Meanwhile, Grenz’s defence on behalf of Pannenberg in the face of Clark’s critique also leaves much to be desired. Although it is true that “Pannenberg’s understanding of the relationship between Jesus’ resurrection and the general resurrection is more intricate than is suggested by this criticism”, Grenz gives in too quickly and tries to sidestep the issue by admitting, “Jesus is not the guarantor of our resurrection.”¹⁵⁹ Instead, Grenz appeals to “the Spirit of life, who is active in Jesus’ resurrection.”¹⁶⁰

“To be sure,” Pannenberg does spell out categorically, “only Jesus’ resurrection guarantees to the individual his own future participation in salvation.”¹⁶¹ For our purposes here, we are not interested in the historical uniqueness and individuality of Jesus per se. Pannenberg sets the scene succinctly by arguing, “Christology involves Jesus’ uniqueness only under a certain perspective, namely, to the extent that it has universal significance, to the extent that this particularity possesses saving significance for all other men. The saving significance indeed implies universality, namely, a relation to the universality of human destiny, which is valid for individuals as men and thus for all of them in common. This saving significance means the emancipation of men for their common destiny as men.”¹⁶² For Pannenberg, then, by depicting Jesus as the new eschatological or last Adam, and therefore as the definitive

158 Iain Nicol, “Facts and Meanings: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Theology as History and the Role of the Historical-Critical Method”, *Religious Studies*, 12 (1976): 131.

159 Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, p. 143.

160 Ibid. Here is another area where the doctrine of the Trinity has to be brought in if a complete exposition of all the relevant issues is to be undertaken. Admittedly, Pannenberg believes that the Spirit is the power of life, and that Jesus has been raised through the Spirit (Rom. 1:4; 8:2, 11). “The Spirit”, for Pannenberg, “incorporates men into the worldwide body of Christ ... and finally brings about the resurrection of the dead. The Spirit guarantees the participation of the believers in the living Jesus Christ” (*Jesus – God and Man*, p. 172). In addition, the life-creating principle of the Spirit does not only produce the resurrection life, but it is one with that life in distinction from the present, temporal life, and, corresponding to the Israelite expectation, the Spirit will remain upon human beings in the end of time. This in turn lends support to Paul’s claim of a spiritual body in his delineation of the uniqueness of the resurrection life.

161 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 81.

162 Ibid., p. 189.

form of humanity, the apostle Paul has given expression to the universal significance of the person and history of Jesus in the light of the Easter event – a significance that reaches far beyond the people of Israel. As Pannenberg himself states, “Paul’s interpretation of Jesus Christ as a new, second Adam played a fundamental role here: ‘The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven ... Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven’ (1 Cor. 15:47, 49).”¹⁶³ Thus, what is first and original is no longer regarded as the highest, whereas the second and final human being is heavenly and immortal. Moreover, there is a social reference oriented to human community in that *we* all will bear the image of the new and heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:49), and will be changed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). In other words, what has previously been regarded as humanity is now replaced by a radically new kind of humanity as a result of the appearance of Jesus Christ through participation in his obedience, in his death and resurrection, thereby forming the soteriological motif of Paul’s Adam Christology.

With the beginning of the reality of this new man that has already occurred in Jesus’ resurrection, there is a real parallel between Adam and Christ, for the reality of the new, last man is destined to become effective for all human persons through Jesus, just as sin and death inflict upon every individual through the first Adam. In the case of Adam, each of us sins as Adam did, and death has thus come upon all (Rom. 5:12). As the resurrected Lord, as “the first fruits of those who have died” (1 Cor. 15:20), Jesus is the prototype of reconciled humanity. Hence, Paul continues, “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (15:21f.). According to Pannenberg, the idea of Jesus’ representation of humanity before God is contained “in Jesus’ realisation of man’s destiny as such, in his simply becoming the representative of true humanity, as is asserted by the Pauline idea of Jesus as the New Adam.”¹⁶⁴ It should be emphasised that Jesus is not the representative of humanity in that he stands outside it, but in that he is himself humanity and represents united in himself what is alike in all other human beings.

However, to describe Jesus as only a representative or an exemplary of humanity does not do justice to the full meaning of Pannenberg’s thought. In this respect, Wenz correctly interprets, “Jesus is thus the *Revealer of the true essence of the human being*, because he in his work and fate realises human destiny exemplarily and in a universally valid way. Yet, the humanness of Jesus does not exhaust itself in the function of an example recommended for imitation. Rather, it brings about at the same time what is shown in an exemplary way in order to develop the fulfilment of the creaturely destiny for all human beings, who participate in him in the power of the Holy Spirit through faith. In that really exists the salvific significance of the humanness of Jesus. In this sense, the doctrine of the humanness of Jesus characterises the soteriological component of Christology. It thematises Jesus’ divine being as the being for us.”¹⁶⁵

163 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 496.

164 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 197.

165 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Systematische Theologie*, p. 171.

For Pannenberg, it is important to situate Jesus in the history of humanity in order to grasp Jesus' relation to human creation. Jesus' history has unfolded "as predicted or interpreted in advance by the words of Scripture. This means that Jesus' history is not a chain of irrelevant accidents, but was anticipated in God's plan for history in the way that it happened."¹⁶⁶ Jesus is elected not for himself, but for a very special task in the whole of saving history, and thereby for the whole of humanity. To put it another way, Jesus is the ruling centre of history by virtue of his divine predestination. Since only Jesus, the eschatological human being, is the image of God, the first Adam has been confronted in Jesus by a new and final form of human being, whose image we all bear and to whom we are all to be conformed. Pannenberg articulates succinctly that "the concept of the divine image, in which the first human being was created but which is brought to completion only by Jesus Christ, served as the clamp that held the beginning and the end of this process together in the unity of a single history of the human race."¹⁶⁷ Indeed, for Pannenberg, the Christian view of the human race as a history that runs from the first Adam to the new and final Adam has replaced the philosophical concept of an immutable human nature with a concept of humans as historical beings or, rather, as caught up in the movement of that concrete history.¹⁶⁸

Pannenberg calls attention to the task of Jesus in the divine plan of salvation with reference to both Luke and Paul. The significance of the appearance of Jesus for humanity manifests itself in that all human history is ordered towards him. Within the framework of the divine plan, Jesus forms the centre of gravity towards which everything else is directed, for God's salvation has appeared in him. Everything is predestined towards Jesus, and he is predestined to the summation of the whole creation, in particular the summation of humanity. For Pannenberg, "Jesus' predestination is his destiny to reconcile the universe in the literal sense that everything will be taken up into sonship."¹⁶⁹ God's eternal plan "for the fullness of time" is to "gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). It can, therefore, be said that Christians are elected *in* Jesus Christ, in communion with him, insofar as they consciously participate in the summation of the universe in him and in the ordering of all things towards him in that this plan of God is revealed to them (1:9).

Accordingly, Pannenberg's assertion goes far beyond the view that Jesus is the representative of humanity. At the very least, Pannenberg's claim amounts to an extreme form of representation of humanity before God, in that "'everything' with which God's plan for history has to do will be embraced in him."¹⁷⁰ In other words, through the new Adam, the summation of humanity takes place. The prototypal or exemplary character of what has appeared in Jesus must be seen to be subordinated to the concept of summation, which concerns essentially the saving history of humanity. Thus, we believe that the Christological foundation of Pannenberg's concept of human destiny is at its core soteriological and eschatological, for it speaks of the

166 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 378.

167 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 499.

168 See also the section on "Historicity of Humanity" in the next chapter.

169 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 381.

170 *Ibid.*

eschatological destiny of humanity embodied by Jesus, the eschatological salvation that springs from the appearance of Jesus and the eschatological lordship of God proclaimed by Jesus. Pannenberg rightly argues, "If Jesus' election is conceived from the beginning in its being ordered toward the rest of humanity, it cannot be understood as the prototype of our election subsisting in itself. Instead, it must be understood with Eph. 1:10 as the summation of the whole creation and in this way as the eschatological decision about the election or rejection of every individual creature."¹⁷¹ What is more, the predestination of Jesus Christ does not mean the divine election of this particular man for his own sake; rather, it is related from the very outset to the reconciliation of all humanity. In short, Jesus is the head of humanity that is embraced in him.

Eschatologically, the Christ event is the summation of the universe from its end in that this event has consummating power in the fullness of time. Only viewed from this perspective is human history to be seen as a unity. The eschatological character makes the Christ event the common point of reference for the meaning of all other events, whether or not this is understandable for us now. The summation of all events to unity through Jesus Christ is the basis of Jesus as the head of humanity and of the universe generally. In other words, the Christ event establishes not only the unity of human history, but thereby also the unity of the universe. Only because *in* Jesus the eschatological destiny and future of humanity has begun, can he be unifying and all-embracing without being detrimental to humanity's open future. Since the lordship of human over nature is essentially activity that establishes unity, Pannenberg explains, "it [nature] finds its fulfilment only in the unity of humanity itself."¹⁷² Thus, he continues, "the history of Jesus, on the basis of which humanity is embraced into the unity of a single history, is at the same time the consummation of the unity of the world. As humanity in its history, so too the material universe is only brought together to the unity of a world through its relation to Jesus."¹⁷³

Significance of Jesus' Resurrection for Human Destiny

To be more precise, only in Jesus, or rather, only in the light of the eschatological event of his resurrection, is the eternal Son of God present in time, thereby mediating the creation of the world into Sonship; that is, into its appropriate relation to God, and reconciling it with God. As a result, the whole world process receives its structure and meaning. For Pannenberg, the proof of Jesus' apocalyptic significance is the resurrection, which is the sign that Jesus' message and self-understanding ought to be heeded, namely his self-proclamation as the unique Son of God and divine revelation. Pannenberg argues forcefully, "Only by his resurrection from the dead did the Crucified attain to the dignity of the Kyrios (Phil. 2:9–11). Only thus was he appointed the Son of God in power (Rom. 1:4). Only in the light of the resurrection is he the preexistent Son. Only as the risen Lord is he always the living Lord of his

171 *Ibid.*, p. 386.

172 *Ibid.*, p. 390.

173 *Ibid.*

community.”¹⁷⁴ We may also add that only in the light of Jesus’ resurrection is he then believed to be divinely recognised as the coming Messiah, so that confession of his messiahship comes to be associated with his name, becomes a part of this name, and influences the recounting of his earthly history. That is why Pannenberg asserts, “The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of Christian faith, yet not as an isolated event, but in its reference back to the earthly sending of Jesus and his death on the cross.”¹⁷⁵ We can thus say that Pannenberg has made great strides in the recovery of continuity with early Christianity by making resurrection, as opposed to incarnation, the organising centre around which Christian thought revolves. Schwöbel rightly interprets Pannenberg’s claim that “the destiny of humanity has been actualised in Jesus and specifically in his resurrection [which] is the ground for the hope that our future resurrection will realise our true being as communion with God in the divine kingdom.”¹⁷⁶

This brings us onto the question, “What about those mighty deeds during Jesus’ earthly ministry? Why can they not perform the function as that of Jesus’ resurrection?” Of course, it is because Jesus’ mighty acts can authenticate his claim only to a certain extent, not fully and unequivocally. His deeds, Pannenberg says, “could point to the beginning of the time of salvation, but they could not show unambiguously whether Jesus personally was the one in whom salvation or judgment are ultimately decided.”¹⁷⁷ Only the occurrence of what is ultimate, no longer superseded, is capable of qualifying the whole of the temporal course of time, beyond the moment of its own occurrence, that it can be strictly conceived as true in eternity and therefore as united with God’s eternity. Here, we see that the eschatological character of Jesus and his history as a prolepsis of the end is the correlate and the foundation of his unity with God. In addition, he continues elsewhere, “To the charge that he was arrogantly claiming an authority that is properly God’s alone, he could finally appeal only to the coming of the Son of Man or, as in John, to the Father’s witness on his behalf.”¹⁷⁸ Yet Jesus did not have such a confirmation during his earthly ministry. Even the disciples of the pre-Easter Jesus could only follow his claim to authority in trust in its future confirmation by God himself, through the occurrence of the end of history.

Significantly, this also means that if the cross is the last thing that we know about Jesus, then Jesus would be a failure. For after his crucifixion Jesus’ claim is no longer simply open; rather, it either has miscarried on the cross or has been ultimately established and justified through the resurrection. Thus, the cross receives its significance only in the light of Jesus’ resurrection, on the historicity of which Pannenberg insists. In other words, the resurrection event is to be affirmed or denied as a historical event, as an occurrence that has or has not actually happened at a definite time in the past. For Pannenberg, there is no justification to affirm Jesus’ resurrection

174 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:283.

175 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

176 Christoph Schwöbel, “Wolfhart Pannenberg”, in David Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 184.

177 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 64.

178 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:337.

as an event that has really happened, if it is not to be affirmed as a historical event as such. This in turn is to be made certain not by faith, but only by historical research. On this, Pannenberg makes his observation that “it is not the report of the discovery of the empty tomb by itself, but rather the convergence of an independently formed Galilean tradition of apparitions with the Jerusalem tomb tradition that has considerable weight for historical judgment.”¹⁷⁹ Moreover, for Pannenberg, the idea of resurrection itself does not necessarily contradict modern science, which would become unscientific if it were to assimilate past or future possibilities to present actualities. Likewise, history would become unhistorical if it were to see the past exclusively in terms of the present situation. At any rate, science never envisions the whole of all possible reality. It does not rule out individual, historical events; rather, after the event it attempts to rationalise that which has happened and that which is present. Pannenberg points out, “Science by no means determines the horizons of the future.”¹⁸⁰ In particular, the happening of the resurrection of Jesus “is one whose final point lies in a sphere which is otherwise totally inaccessible to human experience and which can consequently only be expressed metaphorically or in other forms of a language which cannot yet be completely realized and controlled in empirical terms.”¹⁸¹ As such, science can never be, for Pannenberg, the final court of appeal in the decision as to the possibility or impossibility of Jesus’ resurrection.

Leaving aside the historicity issue, we must ask, more importantly, are there any problems arising from Pannenberg’s assertion that Jesus’ resurrection represents the end of history? Would it be justified for critics, such as Van Buren, to critique that to say the end of history has already occurred “is to sweep all following history, including the history in which we now live, into the bin of insignificance?”¹⁸² He questions further, “Has it all been a meaningless pause between the already-occurred end and its final unveiling?”¹⁸³ However, it is important to realise that for Pannenberg, Jesus’ resurrection is not a closed event. First, as Pannenberg articulates much more clearly in a recent essay, Jesus’ resurrection is “the beginning of the completion of history”, which “has not yet reached its conclusion and public acknowledgment.”¹⁸⁴ Its conclusion is expected with the near return of the resurrected one as the ruler of the last days. Second, resurrection of the dead anticipates “something that will be shown to be real before the eyes of all only in the eschatological future, even though it has already happened to Jesus. This proleptic structure constitutes the inadequateness, the

179 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Resurrection of Jesus: History and Theology”, *Dialog*, 38 (1999): 25. The same view is echoed in another of his essays, “The Historical Jesus as a Challenge to Christology”, *Dialog*, 37 (1998): 26.

180 Pannenberg, *The Apostles’ Creed*, p. 110.

181 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

182 Paul M. van Buren, *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality* (New York: Seabury, 1980), p. 43.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

184 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Progress and End of History, Life after Death, and the Resurrection of the Human Person in Christianity”, in Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life after Death of the Human Person in the World Religions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), p. 83.

provisionalness of all Christological statements.”¹⁸⁵ In other words, Jesus’ resurrection remains an open event epistemologically, insofar as its historicity, that is, its truth, remains contestable until the eschaton. Third, “we derive the words with which we speak of the eschatological reality that has appeared in Jesus from the experience of a reality that is not yet the reality of the *eschaton* ... They are always only exegesis of the history of Jesus and remain in need of expansion and correction in the light of the eschatological future.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, not only its truth, but the final meaning of Jesus’ resurrection also remains contestable until the eschaton. This viewpoint remains essentially unchanged four decades later, and Pannenberg continues to claim that there can still be progress even after Jesus’ resurrection: “namely, progress in spreading the faith in the revelation of God that has taken place in Jesus Christ, and progress in understanding its content. Nevertheless, such progress does not lead beyond what is contained in this event, but only deeper into it ... only in the universal realisation of the salvation of the communion with God and in God.”¹⁸⁷ For these reasons, subsequent history still assumes relevance to us. This line of thinking is, indeed, consistent with Pannenberg’s ontology, which allows the ultimate truth of all events and the ultimate determination of all essences to be open and contestable until the eschaton.

Perhaps the disagreements over the interpretation of Jesus’ resurrection lie, at least partly, in its composite meaning, in that it carries a sense of the already and not yet. *It is both truly past* to the extent that the resurrection occurred at a moment in human history, *and essentially future* in the sense that the essence of this eschatological event lies at the end of time. Pannenberg has given us many biblical examples of this kind of “already and not yet” thinking, “especially in the Gospel of John, where it says that the future judgment is already taking place now in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and that those who believe in his words already are participating in eternal life.”¹⁸⁸ As such, the designation of Jesus Christ as the Author of life is fully justifiable. Pannenberg continues, “Christians who have been baptised not only are united with the death of Christ and thereby have received the hope of their future resurrection, as Paul had taught; indeed, they already participate in the new life of the resurrection, even though this is hidden with God.”¹⁸⁹

The pivotal status of this one event of Jesus’ resurrection, which belongs both to human history and to a time beyond time, is of crucial significance to Pannenberg’s anthropology and Christology. Cristescu rightly points out that this resurrection is fundamental to the basis of anthropology as well as to human destiny.¹⁹⁰ He explains, “For Pannenberg, resurrection opens history to the unlimited new things of the eschaton, and reveals to humanity its final destiny.”¹⁹¹ Moreover, he finds Jesus’ resurrection so important to Pannenberg that he asserts, “Pannenberg’s christology

185 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 397.

186 Ibid.

187 Pannenberg, “Progress and End of History”, p. 84.

188 Pannenberg, “The Future and the Unity of Mankind”, p. 189.

189 Ibid.

190 Vasile Cristescu, *Die Anthropologie und ihre christologische Begründung bei Wolfhart Pannenberg und Dumitru Staniloae* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 13–14.

191 Ibid., p. 9.

has to be understood as resurrection christology, for the resurrection event is the central event, which shapes his christological reflections.¹⁹² As the end of all things has already occurred in Jesus' resurrection, it can be said that the ultimate is already present in him and, Pannenberg argues, "so also that God himself, his glory, has made its appearance in Jesus in a way that cannot be surpassed."¹⁹³ In addition, the eschaton is no longer fully in the future, and has in a way begun in Jesus' resurrection. In other words, according to Pannenberg, Jesus can only be understood as combining the already of the resurrection and the not yet of the eschaton. Thus, the final state of affairs is proleptically in an ontological rather than simply metaphorical sense in Jesus' life. For Pannenberg, therefore, prolepsis implies retrospective causation in the sense that Jesus' unity with God for the whole of his humanity "is true from all eternity *because* of Jesus' resurrection."¹⁹⁴ In other words, Jesus' essence is established retroactively from the perspective of the end of his life, from his resurrection, not only for our knowledge but in its being. This also means that Jesus' resurrection is not only constitutive for our perception of his divinity, but it is ontologically constitutive for that divinity. In short, Pannenberg says, the "identity and continuity of Christ's person is established by Jesus' resurrection both backwards to pre-existence and forwards to post-existence."¹⁹⁵ This takes place against the backdrop of Jesus' apparent failure on the cross, with his pre-Easter activity radically being called into question. Moreover, Pannenberg believes that we would depreciate the Easter event if we were to construe it simply as a disclosure or revelation of meaning. Indeed, Jenson reminds us that for Pannenberg, Jesus' resurrection is even constitutive for the deity of the Father as well as for the divine Sonship of Jesus.¹⁹⁶ Without the resurrection of Jesus, the Father whom Jesus proclaims would not be God.

What Pannenberg is *not* claiming is that through Jesus' resurrection he becomes something that he previously was not. Jesus has not become the Son of God only after his death. Jesus' unity with God, established in the Easter event, does not begin only with this event; rather, it comes into force retroactively from the perspective of this event. Through his resurrection, Jesus is one with God, and retroactively he was already one with God previously. If Jesus is the Son of God, as it becomes clear retroactively from his resurrection, then he has always been the Son of God. Without resurrection, he would not have been who he was. However, Pannenberg points out, "If Jesus was already the Messiah, independently of the progression of his history, if his unity with God had the character of an accomplished fact, then his crucifixion can hardly be understood as anything but a mere episode or a suffering temporarily assumed by Jesus, but by no means as the catastrophe that it must have signified for Jesus and for his disciples."¹⁹⁷ Jesus' unity with God, and therefore the truth of the incarnation, is decided only retroactively from the perspective of Jesus'

192 Ibid., p. 3, n.7.

193 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 69.

194 Ibid., p. 321.

195 Pannenberg, "Postscript to the Fifth German Edition", *ibid.*, p. 469.

196 Robert Jenson, "Jesus in the Trinity: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Christology and Doctrine of the Trinity", in Braaten and Clayton (eds), *Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 198.

197 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 224.

resurrection for the whole of Jesus' human existence on the one hand and for God's eternity on the other. Until his resurrection, Jesus' unity with God was hidden not only to other human beings, but above all for Jesus himself. Pannenberg claims, "The confirmation of Jesus' unity with God in the retroactive power of his resurrection makes the hiddenness of this unity during Jesus' earthly life comprehensible and thus makes room for the genuine humanity of this life."¹⁹⁸ In other words, the idea of divine-human unity existing from the very outset of Jesus' life is then able to be reconciled with the genuine humanity of his activity. For Pannenberg, this unity illuminates Jesus' life in advance, though its basis and reality have been revealed only by his resurrection.

The special aspect of Jesus' humanity is to be found in his mission to proclaim the kingdom of God and in his distinction between the future of God and his own present. He stakes everything on this future beyond himself, and it is precisely because of this that God's future has become present in him. For Pannenberg, "this 'beyond himself' or 'beyond oneself' is what characterises the Christian understanding of freedom and what is echoed in the fundamental proposition of man's self-transcendence or eccentricity in modern anthropology."¹⁹⁹ Jesus himself has become in person the reality of the future eschatological salvation. The Revealer of God's eschatological will becomes the incarnation of the eschatological reality itself. Through Jesus, we can see that only the resurrection life is the final, unambiguous victory over the sinful structure of our present life, over the ego locked up inside itself. In Jesus' earthly existence, this structure of sin has been overcome by his dedication to the Father that pulls him *beyond* his own givenness.

The resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of our future resurrection can also be seen as the warrant for the conviction that human beings have infinite value and dignity. Indeed, Pannenberg aptly asserts, "Only as a result of Christianity has the word 'person' attained the characteristic reference to the uniqueness of human individuality, which is the presupposition for our modern consciousness of the personal dignity of every human individual. As a result of Christianity, the human individual has gained infinite importance, because according to the message of Jesus God goes after every human individual with infinite love."²⁰⁰ More concretely, it is our relation to God, our destiny of fellowship with God, that forms the indispensable premise of such dignity, which differentiates human beings from other creatures. As God's image, human beings belong to God. This unique affiliation has been intensified by Jesus through his message of the infinite turning of God's redeeming love to every human individual, above all to the sinners who have gone astray. We see a manifestation of Jesus' proclamation of God's reconciling love in such imageries as the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The projection of God as searching with eternal love for every single individual gone astray attributes to humans "an eternal value and dignity unheard of before."²⁰¹ The expression of this

198 Ibid., p. 322.

199 Pannenberg, "Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology", p. 98.

200 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Christliche Anthropologie und Personalität", in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999–2000), 2:152.

201 Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*, p. 15.

idea comes into its sharpest form when the Scripture says that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk. 15:7). This is the ground of freedom, which cannot be referred from the actual existence of humanity. It can only be communicated by reconciliation to God in Christ.

By the love of God revealed through the death of Christ, we have become free from any ultimate claims on our lives by the society, the state or anyone else. For Pannenberg, “since humanity has the image of God as its destiny, every human being participates in the inviolability of God itself.”²⁰² In other words, the inviolable dignity of every human individual is grounded in the divine destiny of humanity, or simply “Human dignity as the image of God” as Pannenberg puts it in a section heading in a subsequent essay.²⁰³ God’s infinite love is the basis for our conviction of the infinite value and dignity of every individual human life. Quoting John 8:36 (“if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”) and 2 Cor. 3:17 (“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”), Pannenberg argues against any belief in a natural freedom of human beings.²⁰⁴ Rather, a human being has to be set free for his true destiny, for the freedom that lives by communion with God. Through resurrection, Jesus is the living Lord of his believers. Jesus, Pannenberg argues, “is the living guarantee that death is not the end, not only in his own case, but also for those in communion with him.”²⁰⁵ Such human openness beyond the world is “a source of strength to stand the challenges, the burden and miseries of this world”,²⁰⁶ as we shall see in the next chapter.

202 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Der Mensch als Person”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:166.

203 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christliche Wurzeln des Gedankens der Menschenwürde”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:193. In the section “Die Würde des Menschen als Ebenbild Gottes”, Pannenberg examines the early works of Christian patristics on the subject. Cf. his *Systematic Theology*, 2:176–8.

204 According to Pannenberg, freedom, therefore, has to be understood primarily in the New Testament sense of the actualisation of human destiny and not simply as “formal freedom”, which Pannenberg sees as largely illusionary.

205 Pannenberg, “The Historical Jesus as a Challenge to Christology”, p. 27.

206 Ibid.

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Chapter 3

Openness of Humanity

Instead of adhering to a traditional view that speaks of the restoring of the original state lost through the fall, Pannenberg emphasises the image of God as both the fount and destiny of humanity. As the fount, the image of God is already present in human beings in outline form at creation, thereby providing to human lives a direction; as the destiny, the definitive form of the image of God has yet to be realised fully at the eschaton. An important corollary arising from this argument is that something which tends towards the realisation of the purpose of creation exists in the being of the human person; that is, a disposition pointing to the image of God. On that basis, human essence consists in openness for God. Openness for God, says Pannenberg, “is the real meaning of the fundamental structure of being human, which is designated as openness to the world in contemporary anthropology, although this designation means an openness beyond the momentary horizon of the world.”¹ The human person’s question about his destiny expresses itself in this openness. Only when he lives in the openness of this question, when he is completely open towards God, does he find himself on the way leading towards his destiny. Admittedly, this goal of human openness is not yet universally actualised. Indeed, this is the reality of sin, the subject matter of the next chapter. It is perhaps worth clarifying at this stage that contrary to what Worthing seems to suggest, the image of God does not have, as it were, a twofold definition, when he says, “... not only does the concept of *imago dei* point to the human destination to communion with God but also to an openness to the world. Here we return to Pannenberg’s concept of the image of God as world-openness ...”² Rather than simply equating one with another, to be precise on the intricate relationship between those key expressions, for Pannenberg it is by way of our human essence, as derived from our incomplete image of God and as expressed in openness beyond the world, that we are destined for fellowship with God as the full realisation of that image.³

As we shall see over the course of this chapter, the human disposition to God finds expression in openness to the world. Or, openness to the world constitutes the human disposition to God. This standpoint is given shape by a full discussion in Pannenberg’s work of modern anthropology, especially the strand of philosophical

1 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 193.

2 Mark William Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science: Theological Method and Apologetic Praxis in Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Rahner* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 183.

3 See “What Constitutes the Image of God” in Chapter 2 for Pannenberg’s argument that the image of God is fellowship with God.

anthropology that includes Scheler and Plessner, who founded the concept of openness to the world and its equivalent, exocentricity respectively in 1928.⁴ It is important to note that modern anthropology does not follow the Christian tradition in defining the uniqueness of humanity explicitly in terms of God. Rather, it defines this uniqueness through reflection on the place of humanity in nature and specifically through a comparison of human existence with that of the higher animals, assuming continuity between the two kinds of species.⁵ Philosophical anthropology, in particular, shares with behaviourism and German behavioural research the principle that human beings must be interpreted in terms of their corporeality, especially of their bodily observable behaviour. The justification for selecting this route has been given in one of Pannenberg's earlier works, where he states, "A thesis appealing to man's self-experience as it is accessible without scientific study ... is now too general to be satisfactory, however correct it may be. The same is true of metaphorical forms of expression ... What such turns of phrase imply must be demonstrated on the level of the problems of human biology, sociology and psychology as a constituent element of human nature."⁶

Pannenberg's decisive thesis of openness to the world, extensively developed over the course of his academic life, is introduced as early as in the first chapter of *What is Man?* In his more recent work, *Theologie und Philosophie*, his views still have not changed: "... the relation of the consciousness of existence to the bodiliness of human Dasein remains under-determined."⁷ However, he now places openness to the world in a wider philosophical context as part of what he calls the "post-Hegel turn to anthropology" (*nachhegelsche Wendung zur Anthropologie*). This turn is important to Pannenberg, for it forms the basis for his belief that theology must account for anthropology in its fundamental-theological task. As we explore his thoughts from the fundamental human openness to the world through to the fundamental openness to God, we shall see the irreducible dimension of human religiosity, which underlies all structures of human culture. In other words, he understands this innate or natural tendency towards God to mean that by nature – that is, on the basis of creation –

4 The term "openness to the world" is translated from the German word, *Weltoffenheit*, though some scholars prefer to translate it into "openness beyond the world", or simply as "world-openness". Interestingly, Pannenberg regards "the immortality of the soul" as the ancient expression of openness to the world, for it was "in fact an expression of the unending openness of man to go beyond any given situation, so that even death is not to be taken as a limit." See Wolfhart Pannenberg *et al.*, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou and Edward Quinn (London/Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1969), p. 148.

5 In his *Theologie und Philosophie: Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), Pannenberg brings out a fine distinction: "The question in *Man's Place in Nature* is first of all to be understood as a question about the characteristic of human *species* among the rest of living beings, not from the outset also as a question about a special position separated from all the other living beings, although the one would easily turn into the other" (p. 338).

6 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Anthropology and the Question of God", in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3 vols, trans. George H. Kehm and R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970–73), 3:91.

7 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, p. 338.

human beings are interiorly disposed towards God, and indeed it is even of their human essence to be open to God. “And that is why”, Pannenberg argues, “the religion of humanity in its perversions is not simply the expression of human idolatry, but always also the expression of inalienable referredness of humanity to its Creator.”⁸ This idea is important, as it provides a foundation for Pannenberg’s assertion that their destiny as God’s purpose for them is *internal* to their creatureliness. Thus, human destiny is no longer seen only in terms of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the movement towards human destiny is made possible by purely *external* divine providence. Perhaps one could argue that if God’s love and care are as infinite as they are believed to be, the outworking of his grace and providence should be effected internally *as well as* externally.

In this chapter, we shall relate the concept of “openness to the world” to certain aspects of human life in order to demonstrate its depth, richness and multiplicity as a foundation underpinning the existence, essence and destiny of humanity. As we shall see, this concept permeates deeply Pannenberg’s thoughts. In a way, it is somewhat arbitrary for us to separate the materials in this chapter from those in Chapters 2 and 4, given that the idea of openness to the world forms the fundamental basis to the arguments about human destiny and human sin. Nonetheless, human openness is in itself a complex concept, and involves a lot of different issues. It is, therefore, decided that it warrants a separate treatment in its own right. To be sure, Pannenberg is aware of the limitation of this concept. Of course, human beings are not unrestrictedly open to the reality of things outside them. Pannenberg admits, “A capacity and readiness for objectivity are indeed present in principle, but are in practice always limited.”⁹ This, however, should not pose any serious problem, for “human beings are in a position to recognise, always in specific ways and even if to a limited degree, the partisan character of their perspectives and thus to move beyond these, to expand and, at least partially, to break through the boundaries set by their own interests.”¹⁰

The human disposition for the destiny of fellowship with God is not left to human beings to develop on their own. The destiny itself does not come across them as a distinct goal for them to achieve, but rather, in an indefinite trust that opens up the horizon of world experience and intersubjectivity, and also in a restless thrust towards overcoming the finite. For Pannenberg, the word ‘destiny’ can be used in a meaningful way only if it means something towards which humans’ boundless dependence is directed. Otherwise, it becomes an empty word. On the way to their destiny and in relation to it, human beings are not just subjects. They are the theme of a history in which they become what they already are. This becoming of their own identity is not a producing of the self, but a history of its formation. One could even argue that given Pannenberg’s stance of adopting Herder’s concept of human becoming, the idea of openness to the world is bound to prove irresistible to Pannenberg, or vice versa. Openness to God becomes, for Pannenberg, the bridge out of the poverty of the natural beginning point of humanity into the full realisation of human destiny.

8 Pannenberg, “Christologie und Theologie”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21 (1975): 165.

9 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 60.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

Experiencing Oneself in Terms of the World

Rather than being a microcosm of the world, the human being is a decision-maker who is unwilling to fit into an order of the world or of nature, but instead wants to rule over it. In this sense, the world is only the material for his transforming activity. More specifically, Pannenberg claims, “Modern man for the first time no longer accepts the world as a home or as an order present at hand; instead he uses it as mere material for his activity ... In this way, man’s self-perception becomes an endeavour that is never finished because the changed surroundings can always be changed further. Every new invention becomes a rung on the ladder to further, unsuspected possibilities.”¹¹ Hence, the so-called human openness to the world is not openness for any already existing world, but an openness that goes beyond any framework of the world that may take shape. Pannenberg defines “openness to the world” as the “unique freedom of man to inquire and to move beyond every given regulation of his existence.”¹² This term is intended to state the characteristic feature that makes human beings human, thereby distinguishing human beings from animals and lifting the former above non-human nature.¹³ “In the case of the human being, there is also what Scheler called ‘spirit’ in a specific sense and what shows in relation to the other functions of life as ‘inhibition’, above all as inhibition of the instinctively directed impulse of drives.”¹⁴ It is this inhibition of the instinctive behavioural reactions that justifies the so-called human openness to the world and his ability of relieved objectivity of concrete perception and of corresponding freedom of his own behavioural orientation. Pannenberg continues, “Such ‘openness to the world by virtue of the spirit’ also makes possible, according to Scheler, the detachment from his own life centre, therefore his self-consciousness through which we for ourselves can become objects.”¹⁵

Such a description carries a number of implications. First of all, it means that the human being *has* a world, while each species of animals is *limited* to an environment fixed by heredity. Even where something like an environment appears before the human being, it involves things established by his culture rather than inherited limits. This explains that, for instance, a hunter and a tourist would experience a given forest very differently, irrespective of their biological makeup. Unlike other animals, the human person is not bound through instincts to an environment, but is open to the world, to innumerable experiences and possibilities beyond his environment. That is why Pannenberg asserts strongly, “What mankind is, is never finally determined in the sense of a fixed concept of the human essence; in contrast to all animals, humans

11 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 113.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

13 However, Pannenberg is aware that by virtue of its open-endedness and freedom of movement that is not goal-directed, the play behaviour of young animals is comparable in principle to human openness to the world: “The difference is that the openness and plasticity of the behaviour of young animals disappear as soon as they mature, whereas in this respect human beings remain at a stage of youthful development (neoteny) and retain this kind of openness to the world as a behavioural characteristic throughout their lives”, *Anthropology*, p. 323.

14 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, pp. 338–9.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 339.

are essentially 'open'. Man has the task of 'constituting himself'.¹⁶ He can always have new experiences that are different in kind, and his possibilities for responding to the reality perceived can vary almost without limit. Indeed, it is of the nature of the human form of life to be "exocentric" relative to other things and beings, in awareness of a horizon that transcends their finitude, and hence to be able to move on constantly to new experiences.

Instead of using the term "openness to the world", Helmuth Plessner in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928) characterises human uniqueness as his exocentric position, "by which he means that man has a relation not only to his environment but also to himself", that is, a self-relation.¹⁷ For Plessner, "the animal lives from its centre and into its centre", whereas "the human being as the living thing that is positioned in the centre of his existence, knows this centre, experiences it and thus transcends it."¹⁸ Plessner further explains that the human being "experiences the bond in the absolute here and now, the total convergence of the environment and his own body against the centre of his position, and is thus no longer bound by it."¹⁹ In other words, unlike animals, the human being is exocentric, having his centre not only within himself, but at the same time also outside himself. "Exocentricity", according to Plessner, "is the form of frontal positioning characteristic for the human being against the environment."²⁰

In substance, this exocentric characteristic presupposes the idea of openness to the world. For, Pannenberg explains, "only because man in open objectivity can linger with the 'other,' which he finds before himself, is he able to come back to himself from that other."²¹ Similarly, Overbeck writes, "The human ability of objectivity contains an element of self-transcendence; the devotion to the object presupposes the knowledge of its otherness."²² Thus, the exocentric structure of human living has an openness that is not restricted to the things of the world. The openness of the step which first makes possible the very perception of an object reaches beyond the totality of all given and possible objects of perception; that is, beyond the world. Of course, only in reflection do we become conscious of this. Plessner's idea of exocentricity points precisely to the human ability to adopt an attitude towards himself, a capacity for self-reflection, which at the same time is the basis for his ability to stand back from things and treat them as objects, as things. Pannenberg elucidates this point through the example of social intercourse whereby human beings perceive their own

16 Pannenberg, "On the Theology of Law" in *Ethics*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 40.

17 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 3, n.1.

18 Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), pp. 288 and 291.

19 Ibid., p. 291.

20 Ibid., p. 292. On the meaning of frontal position, Plessner writes, "Diese besondere Position der Frontalität, d. h. der gegen das Umfeld fremder Gegebenheit gerichteten Existenz ..." (p. 241).

21 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 3, n.1.

22 Franz-Josef Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch: Eine systematische Untersuchung zur Bestimmung des Menschen und zur "Selbstverwirklichung" Gottes in der Anthropologie und Trinitätstheologie Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), p. 125.

vocal utterances and experience the reaction of others to these *as* a reaction to the sound they produce: “They thereby put themselves in the situation and role of the other and are able to see themselves from the vantage point of the other and thus from a distance, as it were ... the very fact of being able to attend, unburdened by instinct, to the connection between one’s own sounds and the determinate reactions of others presupposes exocentricity.”²³

According to Pannenberg, we seek primarily to determine what we want and what we really are by means of the world in which we find ourselves. Indeed, “only in our turning to the world do we find ourselves with our place in this world.”²⁴ In other words, our knowledge of ourselves is mediated by our knowledge of the world and by the process of the appropriation of the world for us. Thus, we experience ourselves only in terms of the world, even though this is always incomplete, by coming across ourselves in particular relations with other things. The investigation of the world is, therefore, the path that one must pursue in order to learn one’s needs and goals. As behavioural anthropology suggests, we must always orient our drives, which are originally without direction, through the detour of our experience of the world. Since human drives are not directed unambiguously from the time of birth, they are stamped distinctively by choice and habit as well as education and custom. However, the world as we find it is unlikely to be able to satisfy our nature as the sum of our drives. We, therefore, feel compelled to transform what we find around us. We proceed to construct an artificial environment, namely a cultural world. Specifically, in agreement with Gehlen, Pannenberg states that human beings are by nature cultural beings in the sense that they are not simply individuals with social relations like the other animals, but are social beings in a specific sense. For human beings, existence is essentially a task to which they must constantly seek to give form.

However, Pannenberg disagrees with Gehlen on the degree of significance accorded to cultural formation for humans *vis-à-vis* animals. Gehlen believes that “human beings are oriented and disposed to culture just as other animals are to an environment peculiar to their species.”²⁵ In addition, from the outset human beings are disposed to *create* culture, which originates in the peculiar character of human beings as beings who act. Given his well-known thesis of human beings as *deficient beings*, Gehlen sees it as humanity’s basic task to compensate for the deficiencies of the species. He argues that it is language and culture, above all, which make this compensation possible. They are the result of human action. As such, he calls the human being the *acting being*. “Through his action, the human being *unburdens* himself of the variety of stimuli besieging him by creating through language and culture a symbolic universe, which permits the order of that diversity and provides orientation to his own drives.”²⁶ To that extent, the human being converts the disadvantages of his initial biological condition into advantages in the sense of the

23 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 377.

24 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Gottebenbildlichkeit und Bildung des Menschen”, in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Band 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 2:220.

25 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 161.

26 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, p. 340.

mastery of the natural conditions of his Dasein.²⁷ This means that for Gehlen human beings are beings who create themselves by gaining control of their world. Or, to be more precise, as Dieckmann puts it, “Insofar as Gehlen summarises all cognitive events and cultural achievements under the concept of action, the human individual for Gehlen appears to be a being who creates himself through his action.”²⁸ In other words, human beings are self-creative in the strict sense of the term. But, Pannenberg questions, “Gehlen has however seldom put the question of how such a being actually becomes capable of acting, how he *can* ‘take position’ to his environment and to himself.”²⁹ In addition, the capability of action presupposes already the peculiarity of human intelligence, which for Gehlen remains undiscussed. For Pannenberg, therefore, “the concept of action cannot simply replace the position of Scheler’s spirit.”³⁰ This is in sharp contrast to what Dieckmann suggests: “According to Pannenberg’s opinion, the same function applies to the concept of human action of Gehlen as to the idea of spirit of Scheler.”³¹

Pannenberg argues elsewhere that “no cultural formation can have for man the significance that the given natural environment has for animals.”³² He continues, “Human questions go not only beyond nature but also out beyond all cultural accomplishments into that which is still open ... beyond man’s natural environment and even beyond the cultural forms existing at the time.”³³ For human culturally creative activity itself remains unintelligible if it is not comprehended as the expression of a questioning and searching that always reaches out beyond every cultural form as well as beyond nature. Pannenberg’s lack of complete confidence in culture lies in his belief that our secularised cultural world is dubious about the possibility of finding a unity in the diversity of phenomena. This doubt must be overcome if there is to be any possibility of a life that is still human and fully aware of its humanity. The view of the unity of reality awakens the power for love, which ties the diversity into a unity. We have already seen the crucial role played by love in the unity of human destiny in the last chapter. Here, again, in terms of the God of Jesus Christ, the unity of all things is established by love, which seeks community

27 By now, one may wonder in what sense terms like “initial position” (*Ausgangslage*) and “natural conditions” (*Naturbedingungen*) are to be understood. Konrad Stock rightly points out, “Pannenberg zufolge handelt es sich dabei um die ‘Ichzentriertheit’, die eine notwendige Bedingung für jeden Akt von Selbsttranszendenz ist ... Der Terminus ‘Naturbedingung’ ist sinnvoll doch nur auf das zu beziehen, was exzentrisches oder selbsttranszendierendes Verhalten auf eine naturgesetzlich beschreibbare Weise ermöglicht, wie z. B. der Atmungsapparat das Sprechen. Exzentrisches Verhalten wie z. B. der Akt des Sprechens selbst hingegen ist keine Naturbedingung, sondern der von jeder Naturbedingung zu unterscheidende, wenn auch sie einschließende vernünftige oder geistige Akt der Zeichengebung”, in “Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?”, *Evangelische Theologie*, 45 (1985): 293.

28 Elisabeth Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen. Ihre Deutung im theologischen Denken Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Altenberge: Oros, 1995), p. 46.

29 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, p. 341.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 342.

31 Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen*, p. 46.

32 Pannenberg, “On the Theology of Law”, p. 40.

33 *Ibid.*

beyond all separation, and beyond all suffering. For Pannenberg, only in the power of such love are human beings able to perceive, each in his own measure, the creative responsibility for the unity of reality.

To What is Humankind Open?

As indicated earlier, the human being is open to the world, and thus to constantly new things and fresh experiences. In modern anthropology, openness to the world cannot simply involve openness to the *world*. Otherwise, the relation of human beings to the world would not be fundamentally different from that of animals to their environment. In that case, the world would come to be viewed as nothing more than a gigantic, very complex environment. Openness to the world must mean that the human being is completely directed into the *open*, beyond every experience, situation and picture of the world. In short, he is always open beyond the world. This prompts Pannenberg to assert, “Such openness beyond the world is even the condition for man’s experience of the world. If our destiny did not press us beyond the world, then we would not constantly search further, as we do even when there are no concrete incentives.”³⁴ In other words, the human openness happens out of necessity. As the human person seeks his destiny in openness beyond everything that he finds at hand, he cannot find lasting satisfaction in the world as it exists, either in his technology or his culture. He pushes beyond everything that he meets in the world. Yet he is not completely and finally satisfied by anything. Pannenberg explains that “the pressure of human drives is directed toward something undefined. It arises because our drives find no goal that entirely satisfies them.”³⁵ The ensuing restlessness constitutes one root of all religious life. Everyone who reflects calmly on his position and destiny is haunted by questions of deep and unutterable moment. Speculation upon his origin and prospects, his relationship to the Creator, and to that dim and awful eternity that stretches out before him, must often fill him with anxious thought and inquiry. Indifference to these matters is unnatural. Pannenberg clarifies the issue succinctly: “Openness to the world is basically a questioning ... in the entire course of his existence he is himself a question that has not yet received its answer. Man’s openness therefore points him beyond the world to a reality which is itself not the world.”³⁶

To examine the structure of human drives more closely, we have to understand that for the human being to be driven by impulses means to be dependent on something. His needs know no boundary, and his chronic need, his infinite dependence, presupposes something outside himself that is beyond every experience of the world. Thus, Pannenberg says, the human being in his openness to the world “is not only creatively free to shape and produce things ever anew, but is also thrown back upon a ground supporting both himself and his world, and which indeed supports him in such a way that it can not be identified with anything that shows up in the world.”³⁷

34 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 8.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

36 Pannenberg, “On the Theology of Law”, p. 41.

37 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Question of God”, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 2:220–21.

In other words, this supporting ground is outside the entire realm of existing beings. Moreover, in his infinite dependence, he presupposes a corresponding, infinite, never-ending, otherworldly being before whom he stands, even if he does not know what to call it. This presupposed being is beyond everything finite, a vis-à-vis upon which he is infinitely dependent, whether he knows it or not. Dieckmann explains, “The human exocentricity, which Pannenberg interprets as an original being present to the other, implies a dependence of human beings on a vis-à-vis.”³⁸ According to Pannenberg, we should, therefore, “speak of an openness beyond everything finite that itself also transcends the horizon of the world because only in awareness of the infinite can we think the thought of the world as the epitome of everything finite.”³⁹

Here is one of the areas of Pannenberg’s theological anthropology that has attracted most heated debate. For many scholars argue that Pannenberg’s concept of human openness *effectively* constitutes an anthropological argument for the existence of God, whether or not Pannenberg himself is aware of it.⁴⁰ In other words, while such an anthropological proof may not be intended by Pannenberg, his thought concerning human openness leads necessarily to an argument for the existence of God. Second, they believe that Pannenberg’s thesis amounts to an attempt to ground natural theology in anthropology, in the available knowledge about human beings. In particular, Weischedel takes the critique one step further and asserts that Pannenberg’s claim of human openness beyond the world to God can be upheld only if the existence of God is already presupposed by faith. This is echoed in a subsequent essay by Nicol who questions, “Does Pannenberg’s appeal to ‘man’s limit-transcending openness’ to the future not in some sense involve faith in and knowledge of ‘the coming God’?”⁴¹ Or, is there some implicit *a priori* notion of faith?

As early as in 1962, Pannenberg was already adamant: “To be sure, this [openness to the world] does not result in any theoretical proof for the existence of God.”⁴² That vis-à-vis is unknown (*unbekanntes Gegenüber*). Nothing has yet been determined about who or what that entity upon which the human being is infinitely dependent really is. On this, Pannenberg explains, “The question of man’s existence does not refer directly to a person, and therefore not directly to God. Rather, at first it shows man as dependent upon being encountered by something that functions as a supportive

38 Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen*, p. 35.

39 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 2:229.

40 Secondary literature taking this view includes: Hermann Fischer, “Fundamentaltheologische Prolegomena zur theologischen Anthropologie: Anfragen an W. Pannberg’s Anthropologie”, *Theologische Rundschau*, 50 (1985): 41–61; William Hamilton, “The Character of Pannenberg’s Theology”, in J.M. Robinson and J.B. Cobb (eds), *Theology as History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 176–96; Wilhelm Weischedel, “Die Erneuerung der natürlichen Theologie bei Pannenberg”, in *Der Gott der Philosophen: Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theologie im Zeitalter des Nihilismus*, Band 2, *Abgrenzung und Grundlegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), pp. 75–87.

41 Iain Nicol, “Facts and Meanings: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Theology as History and the Role of the Historical–Critical Method”, *Religious Studies*, 12 (1976): 134–5.

42 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 11.

ground for the existence of man in its transcending movement into openness, as well as for the totality of all extant reality, the world.⁴³ As cited earlier, for Pannenberg the human being himself is a question, and openness to the world is a questioning in the entire course of his existence.⁴⁴ In 1967, Pannenberg reiterated this view, and continued to argue, "... man is a 'question' that finds its answer in the encountering reality of God ... The truth of religious experience – especially as experience of God – is not to be derived from man's structure as question, but from his being met by the reality that is experienced as the answer to the open question of his existence, and thus claims his ultimate confidence as the ground of his existence."⁴⁵ Indeed, as Dieckmann writes, "if ... God should be regarded as the all-determining reality or ... as God of history, then it has to be pointed out that not only humanity but the reality as a whole is open to the question about God."⁴⁶ However, it is important to emphasise that one cannot simply deduce from the openness of the question that God exists. In other words, the natural *asking about* God does not amount to a proof. For Pannenberg, only God can demonstrate God's existence. If humans were to prove God, the result of that proof would not be God at all. The so-called proof for the existence of God merely shows that the human individual must inquire beyond the world and himself, if he is to find a ground capable of supporting the being and meaning of his existence. This is particularly so, as Pannenberg claims in his dogmatics that knowledge of God is possible only by revelation of the divine reality, but "in view of the debatability of the existence of God that comes to expression in the attempts to offer proofs, one can hardly maintain that this revelation is already convincingly present in the fact of the world."⁴⁷

Instead, Pannenberg attempts to show that religion belongs to the humanity of human beings. This would be consistent with the arguments of Herder and Pannenberg in another context, as discussed in Chapter 2. Here, Pannenberg attempts to demonstrate the religious dimension of human openness to the world by an analysis of the act of perception. To put it another way, Dieckmann writes, "Pannenberg's discussion of objectivity as the basic form of exocentricity leads beyond a clarification of the presuppositions of the specifically human self-relations to the question about the possibility and necessity of a religious interpretation of human exocentricity. It follows from further reflection on the implications of the perception of individual objects."⁴⁸ According to Pannenberg, the fact that we can perceive an individual object as an individual object presupposes that we can locate the object in question in relation to ourselves and to other objects within a general framework. This "step into the universal", as presupposed in every act of perceiving an object, reaches beyond the totality of all given and possible objects of perception; that is, beyond the world. Schwöbel rightly interprets, "It is here, claims Pannenberg,

43 Pannenberg, "Question of God", pp. 222–3.

44 Pannenberg, "On the Theology of Law", p. 41.

45 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion", in Robinson and Cobb (eds), *Theology as History*, p. 225.

46 Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen*, p. 33.

47 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:95.

48 Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen*, p. 51.

that the religious dimension of human openness to the world becomes apparent: even if we are not explicitly conscious of the divine reality we are implicitly presupposing it in every act of perception.”⁴⁹ Thus, what can become the explicit object of religious consciousness is implicitly present in every turning to a particular object of our experience. Even when we move beyond all experience or idea of perceptible objects we continue to be exocentric, related to something other than ourselves, but now to an Other beyond all the objects of our world, an Other that at the same time embraces this entire world, thereby ensuring the possible unification of human lives in the world, despite the multiplicity and heterogeneity of it. Hence, even though, for Pannenberg, “it is the function of anthropological proofs to show that the concept of God is an essential part of a proper human self-understanding, whether in relation to human reason or to other basic fulfilments of human existence”, no anthropological argument can prove God’s existence in the strict sense.⁵⁰ All that is maintained is we are referred to an unfathomable reality that transcends us and our world, with the result that the God of religious tradition is given a secure place in the reality of human self-experience.

According to Pannenberg, Scheler, Plessner and Gehlen all hold different views in this respect. For Scheler, intercourse with divine reality belongs to the *essence* of the human being just as much as self-consciousness and consciousness of the world. Religion is not a secondary addition to behaviour that is open to the world. Rather, *at the very moment* when this behaviour comes into being, the human being is driven to anchor his own central being in something beyond the world, for “the human being as spirit was to owe to the ‘highest Ground of Being’.”⁵¹ Plessner, on the other hand, does not regard exocentricity as directly religious; instead, the religious thematic emerges from the exocentric manner of life because of the experience that this brings of the contingency of all things and of one’s own existence. This is, indeed, what Pannenberg considers as the third and most important consequence of human exocentric position for theological anthropology: “It is the knowledge about the contingency of Dasein and because of that also, at least implicitly, about God, who gives support to the life of the human being in his contingency and in his distancing from all that exists.”⁵² For Gehlen, religion and God can become thematic only as human creations, as by-products of the human conquest of the world.

Meanwhile, there are other scholars who believe that Pannenberg has not advanced an anthropological argument for the existence of God. According to Tupper, the human openness does not constitute “a theory of religion a priori”, but

49 Christoph Schwöbel, “Theology in Anthropological Perspective?”, *King’s Theological Review*, 10:1 (1987): 22.

50 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:92–3.

51 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, p. 340.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 345. The other two consequences are as follows: “Das erste lautet: ‘Als exzentrisch organisiertes Wesen muß er sich zu dem, *was er schon ist, erst machen.*’ Menschen existieren von Natur aus künstlich, weil sie als exzentrische Wesen das Gleichgewicht ihrer Existenz immer wieder erst herstellen müssen, wobei jedes solche Resultat aber auch wieder überschreitbar und distanzierbar ist. Eine zweite Konsequenz der exzentrischen Lebensform ist nach Plessner die ‘vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit’, d.h. die Tatsache, daß alle Unmittelbarkeit menschlichen Lebensvollzugs schon vermittelt ist durch die reflexive Distanz zum eigenen Sein” (p. 344).

it does “suggest man’s openness to the revelation of divine reality.”⁵³ In reaching out to a general horizon embracing all the individual objects of actual or possible perception, Pannenberg claims, human beings are “implicitly affirming at the same time the divine reality, even though they have not yet grasped this thematically as such, much less in this or that particular form.”⁵⁴ Worthing responds cautiously, “In light of Pannenberg’s emphasis upon human beings as ‘question’ (within the structure of their openness to the world) which points to God as the ‘answer’ he would seem to be correct that this does not imply the necessary existence of God or constitute an anthropological argument for God’s existence in the strict sense.”⁵⁵ In addition, Koch agrees that Pannenberg has only tried to show that humans are religious by nature, without producing any theoretical proof of the existence of God.⁵⁶ This view is more or less reiterated by Dieckmann: “This proof of a constitutive reference of humanity to an infinite reality, according to Pannenberg, must not be understood as a proof of the existence of God.”⁵⁷ For Schwarz, Pannenberg only elucidates the human striving for an infinite, which “does not prove the reality of God, but the reality of man’s finitude”, so that his anthropological deduction “leaves us only with the phenomenal possibility but not with the phenomenal actuality of God’s existence.”⁵⁸

In this respect, comments by Grenz are particularly insightful that by means of terms like exocentricism and basic trust and with help from Luther’s understanding of faith, Pannenberg sketches the development of religious awareness, without equating the basic religious phenomenon with natural theology. As one experiences finitude and temporality in everyday life, an intuition of the infinite develops. Grenz, therefore, concludes that for Pannenberg, the intuition of the infinite does not itself comprise knowledge of God. Rather, subsequent explicit knowledge mediated by religious traditions allows the human person to reflect on this earlier experience and to concur with the apostle Paul’s claim that all people have knowledge of God.⁵⁹ Overbeck also lends support to this view, when he says that a disposition of the human being to religion is inseparable from his humanity. “But,” he adds, “it has still not led to a proof of the reality of God, who manifests himself in religion. The findings simply allow us to say that religion is essentially part of the humanness of our humanity, and that it is a necessary, albeit not yet a sufficient, condition for the truth of the claim about divine reality.”⁶⁰ As with Grenz, Overbeck believes that “Pannenberg places the onus of proof of the reality of God claimed in religion on the process of the

53 Frank Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 71.

54 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 69.

55 Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science*, p. 188.

56 Kurt Koch, *Der Gott der Geschichte: Theologie der Geschichte bei Wolfhart Pannenberg als Paradigma einer philosophischen Theologie in ökumenischer Perspektive* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1988), p. 199.

57 Dieckmann, *Personalität Gottes – Personalität des Menschen*, p. 53.

58 Hans Schwarz, *The Search for God: Christianity – Atheism – Secularism – World Religions* (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 72.

59 Stanley Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 20–21.

60 Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch*, p. 119.

religious life itself.”⁶¹ This way of interpretation by Grenz and Overbeck has its most unequivocal endorsement, somewhat unexpectedly, in Pannenberg’s 1990 essay “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität”: “God and gods are given only to our consciousness through concrete religious experience, and only after philosophical reflection on such experiences has linked the ideas of God with the concept of the infinite . . . , can the fundamental, original awareness, for all human consciousness, of the infinite be later and retrospectively characterised as an (unthematic) knowledge of God.”⁶²

Accordingly, it is surprising that first, Stock should find the intention and methodology of Pannenberg’s anthropology contradictory, as he critiques it is Pannenberg’s claim “to explain that the specific characteristic of human existence, in a clear contrast to the empirical sciences of man, cannot be adequately described without its religious dimension.”⁶³ Second, Stock believes that “this religious dimension . . . is made explicit only by way of theological argument.”⁶⁴ However, while Stock’s first point might well be justifiable if it were directed at Herder’s exposition of human becoming, it is certainly not the case with the religious dimension revealed in the concept of human openness, for here Pannenberg has gone to great lengths to be *scientific*, grounding his claim in observable human behaviour, such as perception, trust, and so on. As a result, for Pannenberg, the argument for human religiosity does not contradict his empirical intention and approach. Furthermore, as we have just seen, Pannenberg’s deduction of the religious dimension in humanity does not have to draw on any theological argument whatsoever, but rather it is entirely within the domain of anthropology. Perhaps Stock confuses the argument for human religiosity with the question of the existence of God.

Indeed, for Pannenberg, due to the ultimate ground of human essence, the human being cannot avoid asking what his nature is, asking beyond the world, in the expectation that his question will find a reality as its answer. To this reality, language gives the name God. Thus, God is at first only the unknown entity upon which the human being is dependent in his infinite striving, insofar as in this questioning and striving he stands in need of a fulfilment which he has not already attained, which he cannot attain on his own, but which from time to time comes to him in provisional form out of the future of the reality for which he is seeking. Since he cannot give the answer to the question that he himself constitutes, who God is cannot be derived from the openness of human existence. Like all questions that look beyond themselves for answers, the answer to the human person’s question can be given only through the experience of the reality which this question is seeking; that is, through the experience of the reality of God. Hence, the question of himself, the question of his own destiny and the question of the ground beyond the world that sustains it and his life are one and the same question. In other words, the question of human beings themselves and the question of the divine reality belong together,

61 *Ibid.*, p. 120, n.79.

62 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität – Eine Antwort an Thomas Pröpper”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999–2000), 2:244.

63 Stock, “Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?”, p. 297.

64 *Ibid.*

and in a way corresponding to Herder's argument about the relationship between humanity and religion. The connection here implies that only in relation to God can human beings become fully themselves.

Human dependence upon God is infinite, for it never attains his destiny but must search for it. His unlimited openness to the world results only from his destiny beyond the world. This "beyondness" is what characterises the Christian understanding of what is echoed in the fundamental proposition of human self-transcendence or exocentricity in modern anthropology. As Macquarrie rightly interprets Pannenberg's viewpoint, the human being is not simply egocentric, but also exocentric in that "the being of man ... has a centre not only in itself but also beyond itself."⁶⁵ Here, Pannenberg makes a justifiable comment on the concept of exocentricity that it is unclear as to what is the centre that makes it possible for the human being to stand outside himself and therefore to become capable of rational and generalised reflection. However, he continues, "The relationship and interconnection of centrality and exocentricity remain singularly vague. It is not surprising, then, that Plessner's replacement of the idea of openness to the world with the idea of exocentricity has found little favour."⁶⁶ That is odd, as Pannenberg has made extensive use of the exocentricity concept throughout his theological anthropology, for instance by studying human beings as exocentric beings, human destiny as exocentric destiny, and so on, essentially treating it as an equivalent to openness to the world. In *Theologie und Philosophie*, he sums up his view thus: "So, for Plessner and similarly for Scheler, the exocentricity or openness to the world of the human being meant in the end openness to God, openness beyond all that is given in the world to an absolute ground of the world and of the human fulfilment of life."⁶⁷ Commentators also tend to see the two expressions as synonyms. For instance, Stock writes, "In Pannenberg's argument, the terms 'openness to the world', 'exocentricity' and 'exocentric self-transcendence' exactly refer to the ability that corresponds to the specific freedom of drives to seize an object as a thing in its otherness or in its self-being."⁶⁸

At any rate, the idea of having one's centre outside oneself does appear to make sense theologically. Pannenberg himself points out, "In the case of Jesus, this centre was certainly outside himself – it was the God who was to come, the Father."⁶⁹ In this respect, Pannenberg is probably inspired by the Christological doctrine of *enhypostasia*, whereby the human nature of Christ has no hypostasis of its own; instead, it finds its hypostasis in the hypostasis of the Logos.⁷⁰ To that extent, the distinguishing features of the particular man who Jesus is, as well as the essential qualities

65 John Macquarrie, "What is a Human Being? Review of W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*", *Expository Times*, 97 (1986): 202–3.

66 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 37.

67 Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie*, p. 345.

68 Stock, "Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?", p. 291.

69 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Christological Foundation of Christian Anthropology" trans. David Smith, *Concilium*, 6 (1973): 99.

70 The term *enhypostasia* was introduced by Leontius of Byzantium (c. 550) and later taken up by John of Damascus (c. 749).

of the species (humankind) to which he belongs, are attributed to the divine hypostasis. Thus, the unity of the humanity and divinity of Christ lies outside of himself.

As a result of human beings' exocentricity, Pannenberg sums up his view in the claim, "What the environment is for animals, God is for man. God is the goal in which alone his striving can find rest and his destiny be fulfilled."⁷¹ For this reason, human openness to the world necessarily presupposes openness to God, and ultimately leads to a relation to God. Indeed, openness to the world, according to Pannenberg, is rooted in biblical thought. The Genesis account declares the human being to be lord over the world to exercise dominion for God as his representative, as his image. Accordingly, the human being learns to make nature subservient to himself, and thus to inquire beyond nature about the God beyond the world. On that basis, there seems to be a connection between the relation of human beings to God and their increasing mastery of the natural conditions of their existence. In particular, Pannenberg argues, "Precisely because human beings reach beyond the given, and therefore ultimately because human exocentricity is characterised by an impulse, inconceivable except in religious terms, to the unconditioned do they have the ability to rule over the objects of their natural world."⁷²

It is interesting to see that Pannenberg appeals to the doctrine of creation rather than anything else for direct biblical support of the concept of openness to the world. This move is understandable, for Pannenberg seems to be keen to relate human openness, through the creation account, to the idea of the image of God, which is the ultimate human destiny. We, however, find salvation and covenant as areas, which also lend themselves readily to the application of the concept of human openness.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the event of resurrection of the dead has already happened to one man, Jesus, though we shall still not know what exactly happened there until our own resurrection. However, through our communion with Jesus Christ, our sharing of the attitude of waiting for the God as he lived and proclaimed it, we can be certain of our participation in the new life that already appeared in him. Thus, Jesus himself has become a promise to all humanity. Indeed, the Old Testament promises of God have found their ultimate content in Jesus. But even the content of the promise now no longer obstructs the openness of the future; rather, it points human beings into the openness of God's future.⁷³ Jesus is, therefore, the fulfilment of that unlimited openness which is constitutive for being human and whose truth is openness for God. Indeed, the openness to God that characterises Jesus' humanity in his dedication to the Father and shows him to be the Son constitutes his personal identity with the Son. This conception has the advantage of making the insights of modern anthropology about human openness to the world fruitful for Christology.

71 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 13.

72 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 76.

73 Here, the term "promise" links our present, which needs salvation, to God's future, while at the same time it keeps them apart, for the promise as such is different from the consummation that is promised. The concept of promise alone, therefore, does not adequately characterise the work and fate of Jesus. If his work is seen only in terms of the idea of promise, this would make him no more than a prophet. However, Jesus is *more than* a prophet, for the promised fulfilment has already become present in him.

Openness to God is the radical meaning of that human openness in relation to the world that constitutes human's specific nature in contrast to all animals. One must understand, Pannenberg claims in *Jesus – God and Man*, "Jesus' unity with God as the fulfilment of openness to the world that is constitutive for man as such, if this openness has its real meaning in an openness extending beyond the world to God."⁷⁴ One could even argue that salvation possesses in the openness of human beings to God an anthropological presupposition without which it would be meaningless. That is why only through Jesus can human beings have a future of salvation with God beyond all earthly suffering, which was concentrated in Jesus' cross. Of course, even though openness for always new possibilities belongs constitutively to human's anthropological structure, it can slacken. As Pannenberg cautions, "If the future expectation of a transformation of our world and of the resurrection of the dead should collapse, then the openness for the future of human existence would also lose its decisive impulse."⁷⁵

The openness to the future and a life in constant anticipation of the future characterise human beings as human. This basic element of human existence was discovered first in the light of God's covenant, which illuminated Israel's path. Instead of looking to the past, the truth was sought in the future. This was helped by way of a mediating history that revealed the power of the future as the God of hope. Where what was promised did happen, as in the case of the promise of the land in the covenant with Abraham, the memory of that event was preserved as a vindication of God's faithfulness. The biblical writings are, therefore, documents of this path that leads to knowledge of the God of Israel as the God of hope through the history of the promises which Israel received. God has given the promise, and he alone can assure its fulfilment. Trust in the future activity of the God of promise is based on earlier fulfilment of promises that has previously been given. Only out of such a tradition can the view of human beings be directed into the open future in a hopeful way, beyond the preliminary objects of hope for the Israelites, beyond their fulfilment and beyond their announced failure, to the hope of a final act of Israel's God that would bring all history to its consummation in justice, peace and an everlasting life. Thus, the future of God, of the God of Israel, becomes the measure of all things, even the measure of the history of its own past origins. The Old Testament disclosures of God now, in retrospect, prove to have been only portents and anticipatory presentations of the future of God that is revealed and made accessible in the public ministry of Jesus and in the manifestation of the eschatological glory in him through his resurrection from the dead. However, our participation in the future of God can only come in such a way that we always have to leave behind what we already are and what we find as the given state of our world.

In the New Testament, God's faithfulness finds renewed expression in reconciliation through the new covenant. Basic in this regard is the thought of the new covenant that is linked to the institution of the Lord's Supper. Here, the cup that is handed round at the Lord's Supper gives a share in this covenant. This means that in openness to God believers have to look beyond the cup in order to claim its

⁷⁴ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 200.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

significance as a sign of the covenant in Jesus' blood, thereby in turn characterising table fellowship with Jesus as a covenant meal in the sense of Exod. 24:11, which states that Moses and the elders "beheld God, and they ate and drank." Indeed, the cup saying goes beyond simply a reconstitution of the old covenant. For it also promises the disciples the presence of the divine lordship, which is bound up with the presence of Jesus in person, as a lasting gift, and thus establishes a lasting fellowship of the participants with one another. Moreover, insofar as the cup is seen as the new eschatological covenant, pointing beyond the world to the eschatological destiny, we may view all peoples, Jews and Christians alike, as parts of one and the same people of God, therefore attaining the unity of the people of God.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that Pannenberg applies the concept of play to liturgy, and argues that the Christian liturgy is a sacred play, a kind of representational play,⁷⁶ "at the centre of which is the supper that sums up the ministry and destiny of Jesus and links the created reality of human beings and their social life with their eschatological destiny."⁷⁷ Consistent with what we have been depicting here, Pannenberg says, "For the community that remembers Jesus and awaits his future, that supper becomes here and now a meal shared with him; by means of it, Christians' lives and their world are made part of the history of Jesus Christ ... In play, human beings put into practice that being-outside-themselves to which their exocentricity destines them. The process begins with the symbolic games of children and finds its completion in worship."⁷⁸ In particular, extending the thought of P. Brunner that has not been fully developed, Pannenberg asserts that "the salvation-historical activity of the divine Logos (the Wisdom of God) from creation on via reconciliation to the future consummation of the world will be seen as a divine game which is symbolically replayed in the liturgy."⁷⁹ In short, through human openness, the eternity of what is represented becomes present in time, or the visibly material becomes a sign of the invisibly spiritual. For human beings are orientated to the presence of future eschatological salvation in Jesus Christ that is bound up with the institution of a sacrament. In the sacrament of the new covenant, and above all in the Eucharistic bread and wine, all believers in their openness are taken up into the sacramental action of praising and honouring God.

Openness to the World as Beyond Death into God's Eternity

As we shall see, in a certain respect the fact that the question of God goes together with the question of human beings about themselves finds expression in hope that

76 Following J. Huizinga's definition in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Pannenberg sees representational play as that which "finds its fullest embodiment in ritual that represents the mythical order of the cosmos", *Anthropology*, p. 326. He continues, "Just as every fully developed game is self-contained and complete, so in ritual a world that is complete in itself stands over against the profane world" (*ibid.*). In cult, the audience as well as the agents who perform the ritual drama are impacted by the same experience.

77 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, pp. 337–8.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 338.

79 *Ibid.*, n.58.

reaches beyond death. Such human openness to the world, which is based on the objectivity of their experience of the world, opens them for the character of the future as future, for what is not yet present, unlike all other creatures, which live entirely in the present. Since the human person cannot be satisfied with his strivings in the present, he looks longingly to the future, which is supposed to bring what the present denies, but the future itself brings the new and the unexpected. Here, hope begins just at the point where calculation ceases, and every imaginative calculation that eventuates from a person's hope is also surpassed by hope. Pannenberg observes that "the infiniteness of human destiny and man's radical openness drive him again and again to take a chance on the future and to hope for an abundant fulfillment from it."⁸⁰ In an agreement with Wilhelm Jerusalem, Pannenberg questions, "To what does this destiny point? God did not create us 'only to be short-lived as our present life is', for then he would not have created for us 'infinite desires', and would not have made us 'also capable of infinite perfection'."⁸¹ As a result of the human peculiarity in contrast to all other creatures of knowing about his own death, the ultimate question of hope becomes the question of life beyond death, for all hope appears foolish if death is really the end, if there is nothing to be hoped for beyond death. In other words, whether or not hope is a meaningful attitude in human life depends, in the final analysis, on whether there is anything to be hoped for beyond death. For believers, this is made possible by the death of Jesus, to which the change in the meaning of human death is attributable. It becomes death in hope. Jesus does not displace other humans in his paradigm death; that is, it does not mean that others need not die. Rather, Jesus' death includes ours in such a way as to transform its character, to take on a new sense that it does not have of itself. His death reveals the uniqueness of the human being, who can participate in God's kingdom only through death, namely through the acceptance of one's own finitude.

Yet, paradoxically, the inescapability of the fate of death poses a perennial threat to hope. For Pannenberg, when knowledge of the inescapability of death, which is specifically human just like hope itself, seizes upon a person, everything that fills his days would become stale and empty. Only the person who is certain of his future can turn calmly to the present. His question about his infinite destiny remains an open question in this life. Just as human destiny of openness to the world drives him to think beyond the world to God, his destiny compels him to conceive of a life beyond death. The two are closely connected. Thus, Pannenberg argues that "in the openness to the world that is a part of his destiny, man cannot understand himself without thinking about a life beyond death."⁸²

Precisely because the human being can apprehend his destiny only by thinking of life beyond death, what he decides about the question is not incidental but crucial for the understanding of human existence and for the hope of its fulfillment. It belongs to the essence of conscious human existence to hope beyond death. This supposition finds expression in the language of modern anthropology by the concept of openness to the world. This concept involves an openness that goes beyond every finite situation.

80 Ibid., p. 43.

81 Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen*, p. 17.

82 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 44.

Human openness to the world allows him to ask about his destiny beyond everything attainable and everything actualised, and therefore to ask even beyond death. It belongs to the essence of human existence to press on, even beyond death, that search for one's own destiny, which never comes to an end. It is necessary for the human being in one way or another to conceive of the fulfilment of his destiny and indeed of the totality of his existence beyond death. Where such inquiry beyond death does not happen or is suppressed (since the human drive to such questioning is inalienable), Pannenberg claims that "the humanity of man as man is impaired, not only in a single element but in the very openness of questioning and seeking that characterises man's behaviour."⁸³ For Pannenberg believes, "To surrender oneself to such questioning is the condition for man's full humanness."⁸⁴ As such, when questioning beyond death does not take place, both openness and humanness would be lost.

For Pannenberg, the ancient Greek idea of the immortality of the soul is essentially an expression of human interest in the question of a future beyond death, though the concept is conditioned by the Greek desire for what lasts rather than for the new thing in the future. The idea is associated primarily with the unchangeability of the soul, its participation in the universal Logos and therefore in the divine. However, Pannenberg argues firmly, "The separation between body and soul that forms the basis of the concept is no longer tenable, at least in this form, in the light of contemporary anthropological insights. What was once distinguished as body and soul is considered today as a unity of human conduct."⁸⁵ In other words, the idea of a soul existing without a body has become untenable today. Thus, life after death can no longer be thought of as immortality of the soul, but only as another mode of existence of the whole person. That is why Pannenberg prefers the conception of the resurrection of the dead, which preserves the positive impulses of the idea of immortality. The affinity of soul *and* body is the most important argument for the Christian hope in a physical resurrection, since the salvation of the person, who is soul and body, cannot consist merely in the immortality of the soul. Only if a body is also created for it will the whole person be restored to a new life.

"The idea of raising from the dead to a new and eternal life has its roots in Jewish eschatological hope", Pannenberg claims, which has arisen "out of the problems of theodicy, the justice of God, and its demonstration in the lives of individuals."⁸⁶ As we have already discussed in the case of Jesus in the previous chapter, resurrection does not mean a life after death, a return to earthly life, but a transition to the new eschatological life. Jesus is "the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor. 15:20) and "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18). For Pannenberg, who adheres strictly to the Pauline view here, resurrection means the new life of a new body, not the return of life into a dead but not yet decayed fleshly body. It is important to note that both Paul and Pannenberg understand resurrection of the dead not as mere resuscitation of a corpse, but as a radical transformation, for resurrection is much more than a

83 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 86.

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*, p. 87. Pannenberg adheres to this view through to the final volume of his *Systematic Theology*, esp. 3:571–3.

86 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:347.

temporary return of a dead person to his life. In other words, the meaning of the resurrection reality is not to be equated with those reports about the raising of the dead by ancient miracle performers, nor with those which Jesus is described as performing in the Gospel accounts. Such reports refer to the temporary return to life of someone who has died.

On the contrary, Pannenberg asserts, “Resurrection can only be hoped for as a completely new becoming, as a radical transformation, if not as a new creation.”⁸⁷ The apostle Paul hardly overstates the point by comparing the resurrection of the dead with the creation of the world out of nothing (Rom. 4:17). This new reality finds its expression in “an immortal life no longer bounded by any death, which must therefore be in any case totally different from the form of life of organisms known to us.”⁸⁸ We cannot evaluate this future condition in terms of our present condition. To do so would be to extend our present experience of life into an indeterminate future. For Pannenberg, the truth and worth of belief in resurrection depends on that belief’s ability to illuminate present experience. The idea of resurrection takes death with great seriousness in not allowing any aspect of present existence to outlast death. We have to take seriously the essential character of the future, that it is not completely bound by the past, and the reality of death, which represents the irreversible end of every present form of life. The distinction between resurrection and resuscitation serves mainly to avoid assimilating the former to categories appropriate to present life. Through its metaphorical structure and the significance given to death, resurrection preserves the gap between empirical knowledge of the here and now and the unknown life beyond death. Resurrection also orients humanity towards the importance of the bodiliness, both for present life and future salvation. *As a universal fate, resurrection concretises and gives form to our notion of human destiny*, even though much of its specific details remain a mystery to us. Indeed, as we view resurrection as an event at the end of the aeon that is common to all humans, we bind together individual and universal eschatology. Or, in Pannenberg’s words, “that according to the biblical expectation the resurrection of the dead will take place for all jointly at the end of this world links the final future of the individual to that of the whole humanity.”⁸⁹ Nonetheless, we do know that as Paul says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50), for “we will all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51). To put it another way, Pannenberg claims, “It (our finite life) has to be transformed, in order not to perish in the light of the divine glory.”⁹⁰ Thus, the resurrected will have a body, albeit a

87 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 50.

88 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Apostles’ Creed in the Light of Today’s Questions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 100.

89 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:279. One benefit arising from this link is: “So und im Blick auf diese Zukunft überwindet sie den Widerstreit von Individuum und Gesellschaft” (p. 280).

90 *Ibid.*, p. 278. Strictly speaking, as Pannenberg aptly points out, “Nicht nur das endliche Leben der menschlichen Individuen muß verwandelt werden, um in der Gegenwart des ewigen Gottes bestehen zu können, sondern auch Himmel und Erde bedürfen solcher Verwandlung” (p. 280).

different, special one: not perishable, but imperishable in glory and power; not a fleshly body equipped with a soul, but a “spiritual body”.

The transformation from the present mortal body into a future spiritual body is, indeed, so radical that there is no structural continuity from the old to the new existence. This also justifies Pannenberg’s claim in that everything that we now say and think about a future life is only a metaphor, for any life on the other side of death is inaccessible to our experience in this world, and thus beyond human comprehension. However, this does not mean that our resurrection statements are unfounded or bear no relation to present experience. For the matter itself is not a metaphor; the way of stating it is. It is important to see that Pannenberg’s characterisation of resurrection language as metaphorical is essentially an attack on positivistic and literalistic interpretation of the relevant biblical passage. After all, even Jesus himself refuses to offer any literal answers to the eschatological questions (Mark 13:32). Indeed, what the resurrection language expresses is a sense of the defectiveness of our human reality and destiny as we now experience it and the tension between our awareness of God and this defectiveness. Thus, the best that Pannenberg can say is, “The familiar experience of being awakened and rising from sleep serves as a parable for the completely unknown destiny expected for the dead.”⁹¹ That one may remain conscious of the inadequacy of every concept of destiny and not fall into false certainties belongs to the soberness of the question about what lies beyond death. However, the metaphorical and provisional thinking cannot be avoided, as it belongs to the essence of the human being to hope beyond death, to attain and preserve the consciousness of our destiny beyond death. Due to the communal character of human destiny, it is meaningful to think of the resurrection of the dead as the common future of all humanity collectively, not to each individual by himself. For the individual person has his human existence only in community with others. There can be no definitive completion of the meaning of individual existence without the human community involving, in principle at least, the whole of humankind.

In addition, insofar as human existence is connected inseparably with the world, the transformation of human beings into the fulfilment of their destiny can only make sense in connection with a new creation of the whole world. Thus, the general resurrection of the dead is tied closely to the end of the old world and the creation of a new world. Indeed, resurrection of the dead and definitive realisation of the kingdom of God in this world require a new heaven and a new earth. Not only will the finite lives of the human individuals have to be transformed in order to be able to persist in the presence of the eternal God, but the whole creation needs such a transformation (Rom. 8:19–22). This comprehensive sense of the Christian hope corresponds to the God who is the Creator of all things. To express that in another way, for Pannenberg, the consummation of humanity is at the same time the consummation of creation in their eternal praise to their common Creator. Or, simply, the history of humankind is the history of the cosmos. This apparent anthropocentrism serves to answer the question raised in Psalm 8 as to why God should be concerned with humanity, given the immensity of the universe.

91 Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, p. 74.

Our hope of resurrection corresponds to the biblical idea of God as the Almighty who is free to love and to act. This hope acquires concreteness through the resurrection of Jesus, who has already opened the path to this eschatological future. When Jesus' new reality appeared to the disciples at Easter, Pannenberg says, "it overpowered them in such a way that they found no appropriate word for it in their language except the suggestive, metaphorical expression 'resurrection of the dead'."⁹² We have already discussed at length the meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection in the last section of the previous chapter. Suffice it to point out here that by knowing ourselves to be bound to Jesus, we can be confident that, notwithstanding its ambivalence, someday we will also participate in this new reality, to which the longing of all human beings is directed. However, this longing is not just an image of human imagination, but the result of confident hope on the strength of God's promise. Through faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Christians are already certain of future participation in his resurrection life, so that they live now in this world in the reflected glory of the future ultimate human community in God's love. As Pannenberg states it incisively, "*the hope of resurrection from the dead consciously takes up the destiny that characterises each person's human existence as openness beyond death*"⁹³ (emphasis mine).

Much as the human being would like to respond to the call of his destiny to open himself beyond death, the first problem that he has to contend with is that as a human being, he experiences the world only out of the perspective of his ego. In other words, everything that encounters him through his openness to the world is related immediately to the ego and is harnessed for its interests. If and when the ego falls into conflict with openness to the world, for example through the greed that is enslaved to the things of the world, the ego comes to be closed off towards God and therefore towards its own human destiny.⁹⁴ For Pannenberg, the experience of space and time is always characterised by an openness for everything real, an openness that is an inherent part of human beings. The individual human being attains time and space for himself just by allowing the things space and time in his openness to the world. He always experiences space and time as related to himself as the centre. In space the point of reference for all directions is the place occupied at any given time by the ego that experiences them, while in time the directions are also relative to the observer.

However, Pannenberg claims, "The truth of time lies beyond the self-centredness of our experience of time as past, present, and future."⁹⁵ Hence, only the series of events would remain, but they would be seen together as in a single present. In other words, the truth of time is the perception of all events in an eternal present, which is possible only from a position outside the flow of time. It follows, therefore, that eternity as the truth of time is the unity of all time, the unity of what is divided in

92 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 53.

93 Ibid.

94 This state of being closed up within itself is the essence of sin, which drives the contrast between self and reality to the point of contradiction. However, it is important to bear in mind that even sinners live from human's peculiar openness to the world and continue to be sustained by God's creative life.

95 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 74.

the moments of time.⁹⁶ As such, simultaneously it is something that exceeds our experience of time. Indeed, transition to eternity takes place only upon the end of the temporal, of time and history in general. As the finite is bounded by the infinite, so are time and the temporal by eternity. Pannenberg writes, “The end of time does not border on some other time, but the notion of an end of time expresses the finite character of time as such. The end of time borders on eternity where the finitude of time, the separation of its succeeding instants from its predecessors and successors will be removed.”⁹⁷ Thus, the end of time is nothing else but God himself, and as the end of time he is the final future of his creation. For Pannenberg, this does not entail the annihilation of time, but the lifting-up of temporal history into the form of an eternal presence.

Nevertheless, Pannenberg regards succession in the sequence of time as “a condition of the attainment of independence by creatures as essential entities, their independence in relation both to one another and to God.”⁹⁸ He continues, “Only in the process of time can a finite being act . . . Because the Creator’s action aims at the independent existence of his creatures as finite beings, he willed time as the form of their existence.”⁹⁹ Eternity is also God’s time, for it is not a position attainable for any finite creature. By being present to every time, God’s action and power extend to everything past and future as to something that, for him, is present. Thus, at the level of the creaturely reality, what is present to God belongs to different times, whereas before God it is present. For Pannenberg, the eternal present, which is God’s time, is “the undivided present of life in its totality.”¹⁰⁰ It is the unbounded and perfect possession of the totality of life viewed together as a unity. It is, therefore, separable from neither the future nor the past. Unlike our human experience of temporality, an eternal present is a present that comprehends all time, with past, present and future all proceeding from it and being comprehended constantly by it. In sum, the eternal present of God has no need of recollection and expectation, for God’s day lasts. However, Pannenberg aptly stresses that “there will be no disappearance of all finite distinctions in the ocean of the divine substance, because even in the end God will stick to his act of creation, and on the side of the creature the acceptance of its distinction from God will continue to function as the basic requirement for communion with God.”¹⁰¹ In other words, though the separation will disappear, the distinction will remain to provide the very condition of communion, not only of the creature with God, but also among the creatures themselves in the kingdom of God.

It is our human destiny to aim at participation in God’s eternity. For it belongs to the nature of human openness to the world to see reality in the most objective way possible. This means to see it out of the perspective of an eternal present, which is

96 It is interesting to note that Pannenberg insists that eternity is not some form of timelessness. However, this seems rather pointless, for what is time if it loses its feature of sequence or succession; that is, without before or after.

97 Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 77 (1984): 137.

98 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:95.

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

101 Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, p. 138.

shown by human's distinctive extended consciousness of the present that embraces many things at once.¹⁰² However, Pannenberg argues, "Man's destiny to participate in God's eternal present is broken by the self-centredness of our temporality."¹⁰³ The separateness of past, present and future means that the totality of our life constantly evades us, and for Pannenberg "time is no more a theologically neutral thing than death."¹⁰⁴ Of course, he does not mean that it is an expression of sin simply for the ego to come across itself between past and future. For it is only an expression of human finitude to be tied to a particular, limited place in the flow of time. As mentioned above, the multiplicity of times, and therefore of events, is not only an essential part of creaturely reality, but also a prerequisite of the development of creatures to mature existence and consequently of their creaturely independence. However, the perspective of human self-centred experience of time can consume man's objectivity, which is openness to the world. As a result, for instance, he may neglect the present by mourning over the past and by fearing the future. In that case, the self-centredness of his experience of time and space becomes a matter of being closed off. It then becomes, as Pannenberg says, "the source of the one-sidedness of our relation to the world and the sign of sin."¹⁰⁵ This is what can be called the hamartiological dimension of the problem of time. Christian theology sees here a description of the perversion of the constitution of time that takes place in the lives of sinners. In *Tod und Auferstehung*, Pannenberg explains, "Our experience of time is determined in such a way that we define each of past and future with reference to the present of our self. The temporality of our existence is therefore not ... simply an expression of our creatureliness. In its peculiar form that is stamped by our self-referredness, it is structurally participated by human sin."¹⁰⁶ Or, put more concisely in his systematics, "in the brokenness of our experience of time temporality is caught up in the structural sinfulness of our life."¹⁰⁷

In his self-centredness, the human being claims each new moment for his ego rather than receiving it as a charge granted by eternity. However, there should be no profoundly experienced moment that is not grasped in its uniqueness as the present of eternity. In anticipation of the totality of his life, such totality is present in what is always a more or less broken form. For the human individual lives his life and experiences the reality of the world from the perspective of each moment of time and

102 In a related argument, Pannenberg points out that insofar as scientific technology can compress lengthy processes in nature into a very short time, human beings also have dominion over time. Yet, unlike God, their capability of extending their own consciousness of the present forward and backward remains limited, since they are confined to a position in the flow of time. Strictly speaking, as already suggested, only from a position outside the flow of time would everything stand as an eternal present before them.

103 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 76.

104 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:561.

105 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 77.

106 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Tod und Auferstehung in der Sicht christlicher Dogmatik", *Kerygma und Dogma*, 20 (1974): 175.

107 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:561. Here, we find that the original of "ist verwachsen mit" is better translated as "is caught up in" rather than Bromiley's translation of "is of a piece with".

in relation to the centre of his ego. In the self-relation in which the ego experiences itself each moment as the centre of the world, it is always defined as self-love, as we shall see in Augustine and Pannenberg in Chapter 4. The root of the perversion of the experience of time already lies here in the misunderstanding of the moment, especially as man strives to extend his present into eternity on his own. The attempt by sinners to base the identity and totality of their own lives on the now of the ego, and on the earnest attention with which they may make the past and the future present, is bound to fail. For each now is to be replaced by another now in the flux of time. Taking the moment simply as the now of the ego rather than as a commission of eternity also results in relativising all other times in relation to the ego's position.

On the contrary, according to his eternal destiny, the human individual is supposed to live entirely in the moment; that is, to live the totality of his life in each moment. Pannenberg puts it sternly, "If in spite of all the contrasts of his life man has not remained faithful to his destiny to be open to the world, then he will be destroyed in the judgment before God ... he will be destroyed in the face of his infinite destiny ... to a total, healed life. This exclusion from God and from his own destiny is the pain of eternity."¹⁰⁸ Since the judgement indicated by eternity remains hidden in the world as long as the human being is travelling through time, the judgement can only be thought of as an event beyond death. Only after death can man attain the wholeness towards which his destiny aims. In other words, the wholeness of his existence can only be represented as an event beyond death. Indeed, the unity of his life in the eternal concurrence of all events, in an eternal present, can enter into his life only after death, with the resurrection of the dead.

In the resurrection of the dead, it is our present life as God sees it from an eternal present. Although it will be completely different from the way in which we now experience it, Pannenberg asserts that "nothing happens in the resurrection of the dead except that which already constitutes the eternal depth of time now and which is already present for God's eyes."¹⁰⁹ That is why he believes that "through the bridge of the eternal depth of our lifetime we are, in the present, already identical with the life to which we will be resurrected in the future."¹¹⁰ In other words, the resurrected life is the same as the life we now lead on earth, only insofar as God views it from an eternal present. For what takes place in time can never be lost as far as God's eternity is concerned. To God, all things that were are always present. For this reason, the decay of our bodies is no hindrance to the resurrection, and the question of where we will be during the time between death and the resurrection of the dead is redundant. However, it should be stressed that for Pannenberg the eschaton at which the general resurrection of the dead will take place is "more than an epochal turning point in the flux of time."¹¹¹ As already discussed, there is no structural continuity between this life and the resurrection life, which should not be seen as an unbroken extension of the present world. It is not merely a continuation of present experience for a longer or even unlimited time. Instead, it will emerge only on the other side of a break,

108 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, pp. 78–9.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

110 *Ibid.*

111 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:95.

and until then the powers of sin and evil will rule in this world. Moreover, in the eschatological consummation time itself will end, but the distinctions that occur in cosmic time will not disappear. Rather, the separation will cease when creation participates in God's eternity.

However, would the absence of a structural continuity result in a loss of the identity for a given person? In *Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology*, Pannenberg admits that the idea of the resurrection of the dead "is not without its own conceptual difficulties." In this essay, among other things he focuses on a specific technical issue of the "apparent break of continuity between the death of the person and the distant moment of resurrection",¹¹² which is described by Pannenberg as the limit of the restoration theory of resurrection. Put differently, this apparent break is concerned with the issue of how the people who are to be raised in a distant future can be identical with themselves now – the problem of the so-called intermediate state. For Pannenberg, the very concept of transformation itself implies historical continuity in the sense that a new being is not to be created to replace the old being. Instead, a change is to occur, but it is a transformation, as opposed to a replacement, of this body and this life. Thus, on the one hand, the new resurrection life envisions a complete break between historical time and eternity, between the now and the then. On the other hand, the notion of transformation itself implies intrinsically historical continuity. Given this apparent paradox, misunderstanding of Pannenberg is likely to result, and we can see why Hick would critique, "The content of eternity, according to Pannenberg, can only be that of our temporal lives."¹¹³ He further questions that "suppose that this content is a life lived in desperate poverty and degradation ... in starvation, disease and weakness, and in the misery of slavery or oppression ... I suggest that in the case of those whose earthly lives have been almost empty of moral, physical, aesthetic and intellectual good it is not a credible conception of the eternal life in Christ that they should simply experience that same earthly life as a whole instead of receiving it serially through time."¹¹⁴

To be sure, while it is fair to say that for Pannenberg, the present life has great significance for the content of the resurrection life, the latter is by no means simply a copy or a mirror image of the former, but a triumph over the earthly wrongs, hurts and failures. For, as we have presented earlier, it is of Pannenberg's view that the new resurrection life will be completely different from how we now experience it, and that the essential character of the future is such that it is not completely bound by the past. In particular, Pannenberg retorts that Hick "fails to note the implications of the basic transformation of this earthly life that Paul links to the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:50–51), implications that correspond to what Jesus says in the Beatitudes about our eschatological future."¹¹⁵ Indeed, as already mentioned, the transformation is said by the apostle Paul and Pannenberg to be so radical that it is comparable to new creation. We will see a new heaven and a new earth. Fiddes has, therefore, not gone far enough when he says that "re-viewing one's life from God's perspective

112 Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology", p. 129.

113 John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 225.

114 Ibid.

115 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:574, n.159.

would open up possibilities and depths of experience that had been unknown before.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, his interpretation of Pannenberg is unnecessarily restrictive when he critiques that Pannenberg has “a vision of eternal destiny which fails to balance closure with openness because he conceives ‘the whole’ as a simultaneity of time in which there can be no real development, adventure or progress.”¹¹⁷ The same reading is echoed by Bradshaw, who points to “an apparently static view of eternal life” and “the lack of any really new experience” in Pannenberg’s eschatology.¹¹⁸ Another point worth emphasising is that Pannenberg’s concept of totality does not necessarily contradict the idea of new creaturely experience in the eschaton. For totality, by definition, is a finite totality in the sense that only what is finite can be totalised. Thus, life beyond this totality in the eschaton will not be completely dictated by what happens within the finite earthly history. After all, the eternal, the infinite, is not governed by the finite. In short, we believe that Pannenberg’s direction is correct in attempting to balance the newness and sameness of the resurrected life. However, misinterpretation of his thought is understandable, since he has failed to articulate adequately the phenomena of structural continuity and historical continuity and in particular the interplay thereof, and thus the resultant tension between the absence of one and the existence of another in the new reality.

For Christian eschatological hope, the assumption of the continuing life of the soul as the essential form of its body seems to be able to guarantee the identity of the future resurrected persons with the persons now dead. However, Pannenberg does not opt for establishing the identity in this way. Rather, in his opinion, the resurrection of the dead is comparable to the act of creation, and only the Creator can give the dead a new existence of his own. For God is one “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rm. 4:17). Both belong together. Correspondingly, for believers, creation faith and resurrection hope belong together. God is a God of the living, not of the dead. The act of God’s creation finds its completion in the act of the resurrection of the dead. This explains why Pannenberg argues, “The completion of the world, if God is its Creator, cannot be conceived without the glory of God in it, and to this glory of God in his creation belongs also the overcoming of death, which separates the creatures from the presence of God and his life.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, even in the hour of death the creatures do not cease to be present to God; they pass away in that moment from their experience, but not from the eternal presence of God. In God’s memory, their individual life is preserved. If they keep communion with God during their life, such communion will persist in the eternal knowledge and faithfulness of God. Pannenberg writes, “What happens in

116 Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 214.

117 *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15.

118 Timothy Bradshaw, “Wolfhart Pannenberg”, in Philip Duce and Daniel Strange (eds), *Getting Your Bearings: Engaging with Contemporary Theologians* (Leicester: Apollon, 2003), pp. 77–8.

119 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Progress and End of History, Life after Death, and the Resurrection of the Human Person in Christianity”, in Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life after Death of the Human Person in the World Religions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), p. 87.

the moment of death, then, is that we are no longer present to ourselves, nor to other creatures, although we remain present to God. It is this inextinguishable presence to God's eternity that provides the condition of the possibility that the same life of ours can come alive again, if God so wills and at the same time of his discretion."¹²⁰ In other words, this presence with God inaugurated by faith is the start of resurrected life, thereby outlasting death. In their death as well as their life, believers belong to Christ. At the moment of death, all humans go into eternity, "yet it is only at the end of the ages that all those who sleep in Christ receive in common by the Spirit of God the being-for-self of the totality of their existence that is preserved in God, and thus live with all others before God."¹²¹ In other words, through the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of creation, the Spirit restores to the creatures' existence that is preserved in his eternity the form of being-for-themselves (*Fürsichsein*). The identity of creatures needs no continuity of their being on the temporal horizon, but is ensured by the fact that their existence is not lost in God's eternal present. Or, to be more precise, "the continuity of our personal identity beyond death is not guaranteed by some part of our existence that would escape death ... but by God himself alone."¹²² Hence, Christian future hope focuses completely on God and the communion of believers with him. Pannenberg views human immortality as God's gracious gift rather than as something intrinsic to the soul. For Pannenberg, therefore, the relationship with the eternal God guarantees to believers a future of life beyond death, which will be identical with the present one and yet fundamentally different.

Having said that, eternity also means judgement in addition to salvation and transfiguration. Indeed, as Pannenberg points out aptly, "the idea of the eternalising of our earthly life leads in the first instance more to a picture of hell than to one of eternal bliss."¹²³ For when all the individual moments of a human life ring out together in God's eternal present, the contradiction produces shrill dissonance. Moreover, insofar as eternity is in antithesis to time, its relation to time has the form of judgement. The participation of creatures in the eternity of God is possible only on the condition of a radical change, not only because of the taking-up of time into the eternal simultaneity of the divine life, but also and above all because of the sin that accompanies our being in time, the sin of separation from God and of the antagonism of creatures among themselves. Thus, in an eternal present our life must perish because of its contradictions, particularly because of the fundamental contradiction between the ego and our eternal destiny. The light of divine glory will, therefore, burn away everything in us that cannot survive in the presence of the eternal God. According to Pannenberg, "that is the purifying judgment that Paul describes in 1 Cor. 3:13ff. as a fire that will consume much in each individual case, but differently."¹²⁴ Such purifying fire is seen as the symbol of judgement, representing God's cleansing of creatures. Wenz interprets correctly, "The judgment fire here is the other side of the light of divine glory, which transforms believers, so that they continue to exist and do not have to die in the light

120 Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology", p. 131.

121 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:606–7.

122 Pannenberg, "Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie", p. 277.

123 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:611.

124 Pannenberg, "Progress and End of History", p. 85.

of the eternal God.”¹²⁵ Nevertheless, whether the transition to eternity will have this positive sense will be decided at the judgement when God’s eternity will confront our temporal existence. Only when we are in communion with Jesus does the resurrection mean eternal life as well as judgement.

With and by the eternal God, the past of Christ’s salvation event is also present to believers. For in distinction from mere historical recollection, simultaneity with Christ is mediated by the presence of eternity through the outworking of the Spirit. In other words, the time-bridging character of an eternal present makes possible simultaneity with what is not simultaneous. However, Fiddes has made a fair point, which goes beyond this idea of simultaneous eternity, by pointing out that “God can relate to all time-scales because God can participate in them all concurrently, moving at the same moment along their individual time-paths, where we are limited to our own.”¹²⁶ He writes, “God makes room for *all* the histories there are in the universe (or in many universes). God can ‘intermesh’ with them all just because God has an eminent temporality.”¹²⁷ This vision of eternity has the advantage of stressing the integration of time through participation rather than focusing on simultaneity exclusively, thereby leading to an understanding of a life beyond death that is both relational and dynamic.

Openness to the World in the Light of Historicity of Humanity

Thus far everything that has concerned us as specifically human is discovered in the light of the historicity of the world and humanity – our openness to the world and beyond the world, our creative mastery of existence, and so on. No wonder Pannenberg claims, “The modern historical consciousness has declared its independence from its Christian origins. As a result, the historicity of the human being has had to be explained in terms of an anthropological basis that antecedes history.”¹²⁸ It is, however, important to point out at the outset that assertion of the historicity of an event does not mean that its facticity is so certain that there can be no longer any doubt or dispute about it. Indeed, the degree of decisiveness with which historical claims can be made is an entirely separate matter, for being historical does not mean being historically provable. It simply means that an event has actually taken place. Claims to historicity suggest merely that an assertion will stand up to historical investigation, even though there may be differences and debates about the judgement. For instance, Pannenberg elucidates that “in the case of the resurrection of Jesus, all Christians must realise that the facticity of the event will be contested right up to the eschatological consummation of the world because its uniqueness transcends an understanding of reality that is oriented only to this passing world and because the new reality that has come in the resurrection of Jesus has not yet universally and definitively manifested itself.”¹²⁹ More precisely, the reality that

125 Gunther Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 267.

126 Fiddes, *The Promised End*, p. 130.

127 Ibid.

128 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 502.

129 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:361.

breaks in with the resurrection of Jesus is not yet complete, and to that extent the event is debatable. Yet, we can still maintain that it has already happened, and the fact that the new life has come makes Christian hope well grounded.

According to Pannenberg, “man is by nature historical.”¹³⁰ Whether it is the life span of the individual human being or the larger story of peoples and states, human life takes concrete form in history. Not only is man’s decision historic, he also lives in an interconnected series of events, which includes his own decisions and everything that encounters him. All these constitute his history, which is entirely particular and unique. History, Pannenberg describes, “is the *principium individuationis* (‘principle of individuation’) in the life both of individuals and of peoples and cultures.”¹³¹ The individuality of a person is defined decisively by the course of his life, for a chain of contingencies shapes the concrete content of each single life. In other words, his individuality emerges through the unique interconnection of intentions, actions and things that happen to him in the course of his life. Only this path constitutes the concrete reality of a particular person, as all the events in his life have their particular meaning and significance only in the context of his life history.

Each person’s history shows the path of a completely special guidance that is given to him by God, by the God about whom he asks in his openness to the world. As such, God is the source of history, through which he embraces all things in his omnipresence, in his eternal faithfulness to himself. God not only allows the boundless diversity of his creative possibilities to take form before himself in his creations, but in himself he is also the unity of this richness. In the history of Christian anthropology, however, the historical dimension in the conception of the human person did not emerge fully until the doctrine of the original state and its idea of Adam as having been originally perfect were discredited. As shown in the previous chapter, this new way of interpretation is presupposed in both Herder’s and Pannenberg’s concept of the divine image as not ready-made at the outset, but being completed in a process. They see the resultant *natural* starting point of human history to be one of openness to a destiny not yet achieved. As a result, they render possible *a formulation of interpretations of humans as historical beings*. However, this does not mean that human beings find their fulfilment in history, but rather only beyond it.¹³²

Pannenberg regards history as “a formative process [which] is the way to the future to which the individual is destined.”¹³³ The significance of a person’s history for the formation of his individuality is connected with the human openness to the world, since what he will be is not given by nature. The course of history is, therefore, comparable to the human exocentricity, since this also constantly moves beyond all that is at hand and given. The exocentric movement of human life reaches out for a comprehensive fulfilment, which as the goal of human beings in history transcends

130 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 139.

131 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 485.

132 This touches on one of the significant differences in viewpoint between Herder and Pannenberg, as discussed in the previous chapter. For Herder, human fulfilment is to be realised in a state of immortality; for Pannenberg it can be attained only in Jesus Christ and in the communion with God that he brings about.

133 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 527.

the limits of every historical present, for it falls short of the everlasting. Man must seek his destiny, though the decisions and experiences of his life represent merely provisional answers to the question about his destiny.¹³⁴ Hence, the question about his destiny repeatedly arises anew. It is in his openness for God's future that his own decisions and the concrete things that happen to him are accepted as the concretisation of his striving and as God's guidance. In this sense, *the human individual's historicity is significantly dependent on his inherent openness to God* – it opens him up for the experience of the world, and lets his life attain its individuality in the history of his particular path through life.

Of course, the life history of the individual does not take place in complete isolation from others. It is entirely interwoven with the history of other human beings. This also becomes intelligible in the light of exocentricity as the fundamental form of human behaviour. In this respect, Pannenberg argues that "human beings find their centre outside themselves in the shared world and its order, although only to the extent that these become for them the place where the divine reality is present."¹³⁵ In Chapter 2, we have already seen that human destiny is ultimately one destiny for all human beings. It is not that each one has a specific destiny that is his or hers alone. Thus, similarly, the individual attains his individuality only through his service to the community in which he stands along with others. It is only that the path of the individual towards his destiny, which is common to all humanity, is always a particular path and develops the individuality of the individual human being. This explains why his individuality seeks integration into community and, ultimately, into the whole of humanity.

Since history is the reality wherein human beings live, the unity of humanity in world history cannot eventuate from its beginning, but only from its end, where past, present and future are embraced as a single history. As long as the journey is incomplete, it can be described only in terms anticipatory of its end and goal. It is in the light of that end and goal that human beings grasp the meaning of their lives and the task that life sets them. Pannenberg rightly points out that "the unfinished character of the historical process challenges the claim of either the philosopher of history or the historian to grasp the whole of human reality."¹³⁶ For the entire course of the world from creation till the future end of the world is thought of as a history of divine action that embraces all nations and even nature. Human beings as historical beings is not only the goal, but also the movement of the history that leads to the goal. This movement derives its unity from the future by which it will be completed. Only through anticipation of this future can human beings exist presently as themselves. In addition, the meaning of history as a whole is determined only from the perspective of this future end. Thus, according to the Jewish apocalyptic, the conception of the total course of the world as history is possible only when it is seen in the light of the expectation of the end of history, with the prospect of the resurrection of the

134 Likewise, the identity of an individual that emerges in the course of history is always provisional to the extent that future events will appear and contribute to defining the being of the individual, thereby showing his identity in a new light.

135 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 490.

136 *Ibid.*, p. 486.

dead, the judgement of the world, and eternal life. For this reason, human beings in their openness to the world need to understand their present concrete existence as not simply a product of their own capricious choices, *but as a call and election with a view to that future*.¹³⁷ Indeed, the doctrine of election has its significance to the concept of human destiny. However, due to space limitation, we shall turn only briefly to Overbeck's summary contained in a footnote, where he is right to bring out, "... his [Pannenberg's] expositions show the idea of election as the key to the history of humanity on the way to its destiny. History is always history of election, for a God, who does not act, is not God at all and would be powerless and nothing. It is the idea of election, which for Pannenberg offers the scope of reference to a theology of history. From the Jewish and Christian tradition, he unfolds the development of the idea of election along two main lines: the election of the individual for salvation and the election of the historical people of God ... God acts in history so that any serious theology of history has to understand God 'as the determining power in the course of history'."¹³⁸ Overbeck then concludes, "Election and judgment as categories of the talk of God's act in history would become expressions of God's will of the covenant with human beings, thereby also of the basic framework of a theology of history ... Election, judgment and covenant are key ideas to a theological interpretation of historical experience and tradition."¹³⁹

For Pannenberg, it is profoundly significant that the beginning of the end of history in Jesus, through the end event of the resurrection of the dead, has established Jesus' significance as God's final revelation to human beings.¹⁴⁰ As a result, human destiny is determined by his relation to Jesus. Pannenberg asserts that "man's final destiny comes into view in the anticipation of the end of history in Jesus, and with man's final destiny history simultaneously comes into view in its entire extent as world history."¹⁴¹ Indeed, the unity of history is established by the appearance of the end of all events through God's revelation in Jesus. What is more, as the history of humanity achieves unity only in the light of the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in the final analysis it is Jesus who embraces the world process into the unity of a history. Without this unifying bond, their experiences and future would fall apart as blocks without connection. In this unity, human destiny attains its unified configuration, which incorporates each person with his uniqueness and his particular path. Pannenberg thus concludes that "the view of the unity of history as it is established in Jesus' fate makes it possible for each individual to attain the wholeness of his own life by knowing that he, together with all men, is related to that centre."¹⁴²

137 Here, the identity of their present existence presupposes not only their personal future, but also in a way the future of their people and their world and even the future of all humankind, as individuals are inseparable from their world.

138 Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch*, p. 66, n.175.

139 *Ibid.*, p. 67, n.175.

140 For a detailed exposition of the subject, see Pannenberg *et al.*, *Revelation as History*.

141 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 146.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Chapter 4

Sin as an Antithesis to Human Destiny

Pannenberg's doctrine of sin is, of course, crucially important to our understanding of his whole enterprise of theological anthropology, for sin, together with the metaphor of the image of God, constitutes the most significant theological issue in this part of his work.¹ The doctrines of the image of God and sin thematise two basic aspects between anthropological phenomena and the reality of God. As already presented in detail in Chapter 2, to speak of the image of God in human beings is to refer to their closeness to the divine reality, a closeness that also determines their unique position in the world of creation. By contrast, to speak of sin is to point to the factual separation from God of human beings, whose true destiny is, nonetheless, fellowship with God. It has been argued earlier that the image of God, conceived as human destiny, is to be understood as providing direction for the process of self-integration in the living of human life, while sin, being the failure to achieve this destiny, destroys human identity and breaks the unity of human reality. In this sense, the doctrines of the image of God and sin delineate the anthropological manifestation of the basic tension between closeness to God and separation from God that marks all of one's religious life. At the same time, for the purposes of our work, discussions of sin would serve to project a balanced view of the reality of humanity so as to avoid giving the otherwise over-optimistic picture that every human being is infinitely open to God and fully realises his destiny. *Notwithstanding our image of God, the way from disposition to actualisation of human destiny is, indeed, broken by sin.*

Unlike some of Pannenberg's earlier works, the *Systematic Theology* is marked by an important difference in approach in that the relation between anthropology and theology is reversed, giving primacy to classical doctrines, thereby rendering the role of anthropology as fundamental theology relatively subdued.² Pannenberg shapes his discussion of sin differently, depending on whether it is delineated in the context of systematics or anthropology. In his *Systematic Theology* (vol. 2), the basic orientation to Pannenberg's doctrine of sin is presented in Chapter 8, with a heading, "The Dignity and Misery of Humanity". These two terms summarise succinctly his view of the human contradiction, and correlate to the image of God

1 However, surprisingly, there is no published secondary literature solely on Pannenberg's doctrine of sin.

2 In earlier works, Pannenberg has elevated anthropology to the status of a type of fundamental theology in providing the methodological starting point for his theological enterprise. This approach is manifested not just in *What is Man?* and *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, but is also endorsed repeatedly in many of his essays – notable examples can be found in *Basic Questions in Theology*, such as "The Question of God" in vol. 2 and "Anthropology and the Question of God" in vol. 3.

and sin respectively. By God's grace, dignity accrues to us by virtue of our being destined for fellowship with God; however, human beings choose to sin, resulting in misery instead. In Chapter 8, Pannenberg's theological agenda is made explicit. He begins straightaway with knowledge of God as the Creator of the world and humanity, and with the importance of the relation to God for human fulfilment. He then moves onto the idea of human misery, at which point the Augustinian thought is introduced to discuss the misery of striving after that which is in truth not worth loving. On a wider scale, Chapter 8 is situated amid Pannenberg's attempt to offer an integrated interpretation of God, the world and humanity from the standpoint of the divine revelation on which the Christian faith rests. In other words, Pannenberg aims to deal with knowledge derived from experience of the world and humanity in the light of the Christian understanding of God. We see tensions between the reality of faith and the reality of life. This brings into sharper focus towards the end of the book that the reconciliation of the world with God, which Christian faith finds grounded and anticipated in the death of Jesus, remains incomplete with respect to the reality of the human race and its history.

However, in the context of anthropology, Pannenberg pursues the discussion of sin with a different focus. He locates sin in the natural conditions of human existence, and as such human sinful behaviour is studied as an empirical datum. At the heart of Pannenberg's interest in anthropology lies a theological motivation of apologetics. His account of sin is clearly structured to rebut secular critique. That is why in *Anthropology* Pannenberg starts the chapter on sin with the brokenness in human life and the related ambiguity of human behaviour in terms of a tension within the ego itself in its structure of centrality and exocentricity. From there, Pannenberg turns to Augustine's teaching on sin to seek an explanation of the moral perversity of the ego in the light of a general distortion of its relation to the world. The human contradiction for Pannenberg finds its expression mainly in the form that the human being is exocentric, self-transcendent and world-open, but at the same time he is self-referenced and egocentric. This contradiction or ambivalence brings about a universal ambiguity in human behaviour and reality.

In this chapter, we shall first discuss how Pannenberg introduces the Augustinian doctrine of sin, and through this process it will be clear that Pannenberg puts himself in the Augustinian trajectory in many respects. Pannenberg's high regard for Augustine is best summed up in his comment, "The classical significance of Augustine for the Christian doctrine of sin consists in the fact that he viewed and analyzed the Pauline link between sin and desire more deeply than Christian theology had hitherto managed to do. The many aspects of his teaching that call for criticism should not blind us to this extraordinary achievement."³ This discussion is to be followed by an examination of Pannenberg's anthropological concept of sin as self-centredness.

As we shall see, the Augustinian doctrine and Pannenberg's anthropological approach complement each other. On the one hand, the former provides the latter with a point of connection with theology, primarily through concepts such as self-love, pride and self-centredness. On the other hand, modern descriptions of the

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 2:241.

psychological structure of the distortion in human behaviour are shown to be in fundamental accord with Augustine's idea, insofar as human perversity is seen as consisting in the priority given to human egocentricity over a destination that transcends self-centred human existence. In this way, Pannenberg can overcome his primary concern with the empirical verifiability of the anthropological claims implied in theological concepts as the foundation for a more specifically theological development of Christian doctrine. After the atheistic critique of religion in the modern era, anthropology has become for him the battlefield on which theology has to demonstrate the validity of its claims to universality. He describes his turn to the discussion of humanity as an endeavour to elucidate the anthropological foundation for Christian truth-claims, with the specific aim of providing the foundational principles for his exposition of Christian faith. Thus, he proposes theological solutions, which would be acceptable by the standards of modern scientific thought, and does not begin with a firm presupposition of the truth of Christian revelation: "Otherwise all their assertions, however impressive, about the primacy of the Godness of God will remain purely subjective assurances without any serious claim to universal validity."⁴ For Pannenberg, this is, however, not a reduction of theology to anthropology, but if his claim is correct that "we live in an age of anthropology",⁵ then perhaps it is proper for him "to lay theological claim to the human phenomena described in the anthropological disciplines ... by showing that the anthropological datum itself contains a further and theologically relevant dimension."⁶

Pannenberg in the Augustinian Tradition of the Doctrine of Sin

Beginning with the exegesis of Rom. 7:7–11, Pannenberg endeavours to articulate that concupiscence (*cupiditas* or *concupiscentia*),⁷ which forms the starting point for Augustine's doctrine of sin, is itself sin and the cause of further sins as well as a consequence of sin. For Augustine and Pannenberg, the summing-up of all the law's edicts in a single commandment, "You shall not covet" (7:7), shows us the perverted nature of sin. This prompts Pannenberg to stress, "More precisely, sin expresses itself in desires that are against the commands of God and therefore against the God who issues them."⁸ Such commands are given to us with a view to life. Keeping them should help us safeguard the life that we receive from God (Deut. 32:47; Lev. 18:5). However, the desire that is oriented to what is forbidden believes it has a

4 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 16.

5 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 1.

6 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, pp. 19–20.

7 Bonner points out that for lusts other than sexual, Augustine is almost certain to employ the standard word *libido*, whereas in relation to sexual desire *libido* and *concupiscentia* are virtually interchangeable. See Gerald Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 398–401. However, even if Pannenberg should have used the term *libido* rather than *concupiscentia*, this would not affect the usefulness of his analysis.

8 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:240.

better knowledge of what will promote life. It forces us to think that the commands have a tendency that is inimical to life, as though observing them would involve renouncing that which is part of life's riches (cf. Gen. 3:4ff). Stirred up by the law, sin stimulates desires in us with the result that latent sin becomes blatant sin in the desires that are against God: "One cannot, of course, conclude that these desires as such are not sin."⁹ Thus, unlike the early church fathers who see concupiscence as a consequence of sin, of Adam's transgression and therefore a punishment, the Pauline understanding shows that concupiscence is itself a sin insofar as it represents a perverted form of love or volition. In other words, in the sense that concupiscence is identical with the perverted will, it is sinful. For completeness, Pannenberg, somewhat hastily, adds that desire as such is not evil, "since the difference between good and evil desire depends on the end to which the desire is ultimately ordered."¹⁰ However, what about those seemingly trivial desires that frequently arise in our daily lives (for example, to dye my hair pink instead of red)? Can we still apply the same kind of teleological analysis to all of them? Should we have another category of neutral desire in addition to good and evil desire? If so, how do we draw the line between them? We believe that these questions need to be addressed for any thorough discussion of desire.

In locating the core and root of the perverted nature of concupiscence, Augustine believes that the perversion of desire rests on a perversion of the will. The will is the turning towards an object in an affirming manner. Reflecting the Augustinian tradition, Pannenberg elucidates that in assessing priorities, the perverted will "distorts the order of the universe by turning to inferior goods and for their sake abandoning better and higher goods – namely, God, his truth and his law."¹¹ The will desires lower things in a depraved and disordered way, and, contrary to the order of nature, turns away from the higher to the inferior. It even desires to appropriate God as a means to attain the lesser, when in fact temporal things are supposed to be used rather than enjoyed so that we may deserve to enjoy eternal blessings. Thus, we can see that Augustine defines the essence of sin not as a failure in relation to the self, but as a distortion of the natural order of the universe. This presupposes a hierarchical order embracing the entire universe, an order in which everything comes from God and strives to return to him. However, the modern era has made the knowledge of nature independent of the idea of God, and in so doing has deprived this conception of a universal natural order of its claim to validity as a fundamental philosophical principle. In addition, as we shall see later, this Augustinian approach is not completely compatible with the modern anthropological approach with which Pannenberg is associated. Under the latter, the distortion in the human relation to the world takes place within human subjectivity when self-centredness dominates exocentricity as opposed to the ego living according to its exocentric destiny. Indeed, for moderns, the primary hamartiological attention is no longer given to the human relation to the world, but to the self-relation, and no longer to the reversal of the cosmic nature, but to the inner order of human nature itself. Only after modern

9 Ibid.

10 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 91. See also *Systematic Theology*, 2:242, n.225.

11 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 88.

interpretations of the human person as a self-conscious being have made their appearance can the opposition of human beings to themselves become the central theme in the anthropologically driven concept of sin. However, in an attempt to defend Augustine's viewpoint, Pannenberg is adamant that "inasmuch as it [sin] is a distortion of the natural order of creation it is also, as it had been for Paul, a failure of human beings in relation to themselves."¹²

The reversal of means and end locates what Augustine calls pride or egoism (*superbia* and *amor sui* respectively) in, "an autonomy of the will that puts the self in the center and uses everything else as a means to the self as an end ... which makes the self the principle of all things and thus sets itself in the place of God."¹³ In other words, the self makes itself the origin of things instead of attaching itself to the real origin of all things. This is where we see the immoderate nature of the perverted will, which points to an excessive esteem of the self. Thus, pride or egoism is at the heart of concupiscence. For Augustine, the sin of Adam is a sin of pride, with which all sin begins. Pride is "a corrupt appetite that wants more for the self than is its due, thus forming the core of concupiscence."¹⁴ This attitude lies behind the distorted desire for transitory things, since the latter are no longer desired as a means of serving God, but rather as a means of obtaining the enjoyment for the one desiring them. As early as 1977, Pannenberg had already pointed out decisively in an essay, "His [human] sin is the greed for the possession and consumption of things, and only implicitly – thus in a disguised form – is also the unrestricted self-love in human desire that is active as the absolute drive."¹⁵ When the ego wills itself to be the centre and ultimate end, it usurps the place in the order of the universe that belongs solely to God – its Creator and Supreme Good. Ultimately, pride leads the sinner into open hostility to God. Pannenberg argues that since its excessive self-affirmation is largely only implicitly present and active in desire, the perverted will that is active in the desire for external things does not initially or universally result in hatred of God. However, in the kingdom of the world, excessive love of self (as opposed to simply self-preservation) leads finally to hatred of God, whereas in the kingdom of God love of God puts the self in its proper place. This hatred of God, though, takes place only in a latent way, according to Pannenberg, who adds, "Only because of that, is human sin redeemable, at least redeemable for God by way of the fulfilment of human craving for happiness with his, God's, own presence and thus with God's own love to his creatures."¹⁶

The structural principle of perverted desire, which forms the climax of Augustine's analysis of the Pauline concept of sin as desire, is wanting to be as God.¹⁷

12 Ibid., p. 95.

13 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:243.

14 Ibid., p. 253, n.262.

15 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Aggression und die theologische Lehre von der Sünde", in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999–2000), 2:221.

16 Ibid., p. 222.

17 "To be as God" describes not only the striving proper to sin, but also the divine destiny by which human beings are to participate in the image of God. Sin comes on the scene only when the attempt is made to seize "being as God" as something to be grasped at, in order to

“This wanting to be as God is the excessiveness of humanity definitely comparable with the act of Prometheus, though with the marked difference that the first human couple *encroached upon the divine sphere out of selfishness*” (emphasis mine).¹⁸ In the relation between pride or egoism and concupiscence, it is clear how the latter can itself be called sin or be called a consequence of sin.¹⁹ Pannenberg summarises, “To the extent that egoism is implicit in concupiscence and that the assertion of the ego as ultimate end is implicit in perverse desire, such concupiscence can well be called sin, because this egoism is (even if only implicitly) hostile to God. On the other hand, the element in concupiscence that makes it sinful can also be the subject of explicit attention in the form of *superbia* and to that extent be distinguished from the concupiscence that uses all things for the ego’s self-centred purposes.”²⁰ According to Augustine, at the same time as human beings reject the supreme good of all created beings, the source of true happiness, their souls are locked out of themselves and driven into exteriority. As such, concupiscence is not only sin, but also a punishment for sin.

Pannenberg praises the Augustinian understanding of desire for its ability to bring out the deeper meaning of the Pauline concept, with greater universality and psychological validity. Instead of equating desire with sin by referring to the law of God in the case of Paul, Augustine’s model of concupiscence relates to desire more generally as an anthropological phenomenon, thereby highlighting the opposition to God in the general structure of desire: “Augustine thus arrived at the thought of a corruption of the order of things in their subjection to God as the supreme good ... The pride that is implicitly at work in perverted concupiscence could even be claimed directly as a usurping of God’s position without taking the detour by way of the hierarchy of things ... The universal extent of sin that Paul could maintain in view of the universality of death as its effect (Rom. 5:12) became for Augustine a conclusion that he drew from his anthropological analysis of sin itself.”²¹ Indeed, the decisive proof of the universal spread of sin, according to Paul, is the reality of death and its dominion over all life. He adopts the outlook of Old Testament thought, by virtue of which death is the natural consequence of sin. As a result, he points out that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23, cf. 7:11).

Since all life comes from God, sinners who turn away from God separate themselves from the source of their own lives. In that sense, sinners already fall victim to death, which can be called the wages that sin finally pays those who have earned them. In a radical separation from God in death, we see the deeper nature of physical death, which is posited already in the nature of sin as separation from God.

make it part of one’s finite existence, instead of putting the latter at the service of God and living it for his glory. Or, in Pannenberg’s own words, “Zu sein wie Gott, die Verheißung der Schlange, – das ist tatsächlich die Bestimmung des Menschen. Aber indem er sie Gott entreißen will, verliert er sie, weil er sie nur in Gott gewinnen kann” (“Die Maßlosigkeit des Menschen”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:218).

18 Ibid., p. 215.

19 Pannenberg also draws support from Aquinas, who is said to refer to inordinate self-love as the true principle of sin and concupiscence, inasmuch as excessive striving for temporal goods results from excessive self-love.

20 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 89.

21 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:245.

Only on this basis can the universality of the fate of death be adduced in proof of the universal propagation of sin in humanity. On the other hand, for Pannenberg, the universality of redemption presupposes, rather than proves, the universality of sin. It is only by way of the anthropological proof of the universality of sin as found in the universality of death that the universal relevance of redemption through Christ becomes convincing. "Death", according to Pannenberg, "is the future of every individual human being, and without the hope of resurrection, death would be the ultimate future of humanity. This would be the last word about human beings, if God were not their future."²² In other words, if not because of God's gracious intervention through Christ, death would be the unbridgeable gulf between human existence in the temporal process and the realisation of human destiny in eternity, and would indeed become the final destiny for all human beings.

Having said that, death does not necessarily accompany the finitude of life, for Pannenberg asserts that the "eschatological hope of Christians knows a finitude of creaturely existence without death ... Only of existence in time is it true that the finitude of life and mortality go together."²³ This leads him to conclude that "death is an essential consequence of sin rather than a punishment that God has arbitrarily set and imposed."²⁴ Wenz rightly interprets, "The perversion of the relation to God, as it takes place in sin, is by implication death. However, to call death the punishment of sin is, for Pannenberg, problematic because of the idea of a sanction associated with the concept of punishment. It does not do justice to the biblical view of a connection between act and its consequence, as Paul claimed it for the relation between death and sin."²⁵ In addition, this view of death as a consequence of sin is consistent with the Israelite way of thinking that contrary to modern thought, sin for the Israelites is something much wider in its effects. The sinful deed is only one side of the matter, since through that an evil has been set in motion which sooner or later would inevitably turn against the sinner or the community to which he belongs. In other words, this conception of a synthetic view of life does not see the action of an individual and what happens to him subsequently as two separate and independent events. We have found that this conception is evident in the linguistic usage of the Hebrew words, *hatta't* and *'avon*, both of which can be understood only in terms of the basic "synthetic" concept, for they represent sin as act as well as the consequence of, or punishment for, sin.²⁶ Hence, in Hebrew, the sinful act and its consequence are one and the same. This means that death is built into the essence of sin as the most extreme consequence of sin's desire for separation from God, who is the origin of life. As such, Pannenberg is right to claim that death is not added externally to sin, as an arbitrary punishment imposed on it. In other words,

22 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Die Auferstehung Jesu und die Zukunft des Menschen*, Band 10, *Eichstatter Hochschulreden* (München: Minerva Publikation, 1978), p. 12.

23 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:271–2.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

25 Gunter Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 160.

26 This synthetic meaning is confirmed by the dictionary definition in F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003).

death is not a penalty imposed from without, having no connection with the nature of sin. In his dogmatics, Pannenberg goes one step further, arguing that death in fact motivates us to unrestricted self-affirmation, regardless of our own finitude, and at the same time it robs us of the power to accept life.²⁷ In either case, there is a close link between sin and death, and the fear of death drives us more deeply into sin.

Pannenberg considers that the Augustinian model of sin as concupiscence has an important advantage that makes it superior to other forms of the Christian doctrine of sin, in that Augustine's psychological description is empirically oriented. The real significance of human sinful behaviour emerges fully only when its radical meaning as hostility to God is recognised first of all as an empirical datum, and only as such is it something that cannot be evaded. One cannot simply dismiss the empirical proof of the relation between pride and concupiscence by saying that one does not believe it. Presumably, that is why Augustine does not begin his exposition of sin with unbelief. Even though he admits that unbelief is the root of sin, he is keen to avoid the notion that sin is simply an object of faith. The reality of sin is an object not of faith, but of psychological description and observation. He takes the present human condition as his point of departure. Thus, it is concupiscence or the inversion of the end-means structure in the human relation to the world that is in the foreground, with pride at the centre of this inversion. This in turn implies a turning away from God. Pannenberg claims that this approach to sin is to be preferred, as it is closer to the real experience of human life.

It is this that sets Augustine and Pannenberg apart from Barth and Luther. There is no doubt that for Augustine, the essence of sin consists in its opposition to God. However, even the theological interpretation of sin "as a turning from God to the point of hostility to God derives its persuasiveness from the fact that it can be shown to be necessarily implied by the empirical data, even though the radical perversity represented by such behaviour will be grasped only in the light of biblical revelation."²⁸ Pannenberg takes the view that Barth renounces any connection between Christian statements about human sinfulness and empirical data. This prompts Pannenberg to argue that the Christian assertion of sin should not ground its validity on the decision of faith, for otherwise those who refuse to believe in Christ cannot be expected to be subject to it. However, if human corruption is really as radical as the doctrine of sin suggests, surely it would prevent human beings from gaining insight into their own condition. That is why Luther claims that original sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot comprehend it and so it must be believed on the back of divine revelation in the Scripture. For Pannenberg, however, this view is too close in its formulation to his own objection that human sinfulness is known only through faith. In contrast, according to Pannenberg, the superiority of the Augustinian understanding of sin lies in its ability to enable us to do justice to both the empirical manifestation of sin and its radical character, the full discovery of which is made possible only by the light of grace.

As a theologian who is keen to synthesise with other intellectual disciplines, Pannenberg's position should come as no surprise. However, first of all, is his

27 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:273.

28 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 91.

interpretation to any material extent contradicting Barth's claim that "only when we know Jesus Christ do we really know that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man"?²⁹ Surrounding the debate seems to be confusion between "knowing" and "existing", as if they were synonymous. To say that human sinfulness is *known* only through faith does not mean that human sinfulness *exists* only through faith. In addition, sin certainly does not exist only through the decision of faith. Those who refuse to believe cannot avoid the burden of their sinfulness simply by shutting their eyes to their wretchedness and deluding themselves regarding their state. Christian faith does not create the reality of sin, but presupposes it. Nonetheless, it is reasonable for Pannenberg to argue that the reality of their own lives should be called upon to give witness against them. For otherwise, "what Christians say about sin would in fact fall victim to the complaint of Nietzsche and his followers that we have here a calumniating of life. What Christians say about human beings as sinners is true to life only if it relates to something that characterises the whole phenomenon of human life and that may be known even without the premise of God's revelation, even if this revelation is necessary to bring its true significance to light."³⁰

Secondly, the debate at the end boils down to whether Pannenberg has emphasised *enough* the indispensable role of faith and revelation in our understanding of sin, rather than whether he has given them any role at all. In human sinfulness, it is paramount to understand *which* relation is violated, *whose* will is resisted, and *whose* kingdom is dishonoured. Only in view of such considerations can the nature of sin be revealed within its depth and fullness. Only by knowing Christ do we comprehend the nature of sin as disobedience, unrighteousness and unbelief. Without that knowledge, every definition of sin is bound to be hollow and inadequate, even though it may seem to be exhaustive and deduced logically from empirical data. Only in that way is the great mystery of sin both revealed and condemned in the light of the knowledge mediated through Jesus Christ. Wenz, in his introduction to Pannenberg's thought, has managed to stay clear from the controversy and exercises a sober judgement: "Only in the light of the divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ, as he destroys himself in the hubris of human wanting to be as God, do the being of devout trust and the non-being of unbelief become clear as what they are: salvation versus non-salvation."³¹

Another equally significant benefit arising from the Augustinian model of sin is that the universality of sin can be upheld even without appeal to Adam, without appeal to the idea that Adam's guilt is inherited. Paul does use the figure of Adam in showing the universality of sin, and even traces this universality back to him (Rom. 5:12). Adam is seen as the prototype of all human beings, as their embodiment. Pannenberg writes, "Adam is now ... for the present humanity not only some individual of an early generation, but since he as the first human being at the same time embodies the being of humanity in general, all later human beings participate in his history."³² In every

29 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 389.

30 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:236.

31 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 150.

32 Pannenberg, "Aggression und die theologische Lehre von der Sünde", p. 223.

individual, Adam's journey from sin to death is repeated as in a copy. Following the disintegration of the doctrine of original sin in eighteenth century Protestant theology, sin is no longer viewed as a fated universal legacy that proliferates generation after generation like a congenital disease: "The doctrine of inherited sin has a tendency to derive the general propagation of sin from the common origin of the race in Adam. This tendency, however, obscured the significance of the actual universality of sin as an expression of the universally applicable structure of conduct."³³ For Pannenberg, the Augustinian discovery of the relation between concupiscence and pride precisely provides "a structure of human conduct that is common to all individuals. Materially, then, no theory of inheritance was needed."³⁴ In other words, Augustine regards concupiscence effectively as the guarantee for all subsequent human participation in Adam's fall and in his responsibility. Although concupiscence itself is not original sin, it is a wound and a vice of human nature, and the means whereby original sin is transmitted. Thus, it is from and by concupiscence that the guilt of original sin, as it were, is conveyed from the parents to the child.

While concupiscence, as sin and the cause of further sins, has been shown to have the characteristics of the universality of sin, which is the third element in the concept of original sin according to Pannenberg, he makes no attempt to offer any arguments to substantiate the other features of concupiscence that correspond to its first two elements. Perhaps the concept of concupiscence has greater efficacy than that allowed for by him. What we argue here is that the concept of concupiscence sufficiently and concretely constitutes a new way of explaining original sin.³⁵ First, if we look into the blurred quality of Paul's argument in Rom. 7:7, it can be seen that v.7a depicts primarily a noetic relation between law and sin, whereas in v.7b the noetic understanding turns into an ontic one – when man experiences himself as one who desires, desire comes into being. In other words, concupiscence (or *epithymia*) is both prior to human action and at the same time specific to each human being as his desire. This point is backed up by what we learn from Gen. 3.³⁶ Theologically speaking, the "pre-fall" state is generally assumed to be one of immediate, unreflective obedience to God; that is, it is simply beyond good and evil. Moreover, we argue that any command presupposes that what is commanded is not yet fulfilled, or at least that there is genuine and unnegligible risk of its not being fulfilled. The divine prohibition not to eat from the tree of knowledge presupposes a kind of split between Creator and creature, a split which makes a command necessary, even if it is given only in order to test the obedience of the creature. This split is the most crucial point in the interpretation of the fall, since it presupposes a sin which is not yet sin, but which is also no longer pure innocence. It is something that is characterised by the

33 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:245.

34 Ibid.

35 The distinction between original sin (*Urstünde*) and inherited sin (*Erbsünde*) should be borne in mind. While the former points to the claim that all human beings always find themselves bound by sin that is universal, radical and basic to human existence, the latter is only one way of explaining this proposition, and refers to the sin that results from the fall of Adam.

36 It seems that in building up his viewpoints in Rom. 7:7ff., Paul is appealing to Gen. 3 as well.

desire to sin, the predisposition to sin. Hence, concupiscence is more than simply sin of act, and comes prior to any human action – a feature that has been identified by Pannenberg as the first and fundamental element in the concept of original sin as opposed to actual sin.

An important proposition arising from our argument above is the absence of any original state of perfection, a view that is shared by Pannenberg.³⁷ He argues, “There is no real biblical basis for the emphasis of the older Protestant dogmatics on a paradisaic perfection and integrity of human life before the fall in consequence of Adam’s original righteousness.”³⁸ He continues, “The fruits of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9) were not forbidden to Adam and Eve, but they do not seem to have discovered these fruits before they became sinners (3:22).”³⁹ In other words, the serpent simply brings to light an inclination to turn away from God’s will. Similarly, for Pannenberg, there is no scriptural support for perfect knowledge and holiness for our first parents. In short, we argue that if Adam and Eve were created to be morally and intellectually perfect to live in a paradise that satisfied all their needs, it is incomprehensible that they would have chosen evil. A perfectly good will would presumably will the good rather than struggle to choose between good and evil. Pannenberg claims, “Little is left of the traditional dogma of a perfect first estate when we submit it to the test of biblical theology.”⁴⁰ Moreover, not only does Pannenberg refuse to endorse the idea of original righteousness at the beginning of human history, but he also cannot agree that there will be through Jesus Christ a restoration of this original relation with God. Instead, Pannenberg sees the incarnation as a fulfilment that transcends our first weakness.

Returning to our discussion of the basic features of original sin that also exist in the concept of concupiscence, we now turn to the radicalness of sin. In Christ’s own interpretation of his parable of the sower, the word of God fails to take effect among the third group of people because “the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word” (Mk. 4:19; Matt. 13:22; Lk. 8:14). In reality, the same effect can be attributed to Satan as in the case of the first group of people: “when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word” (Mk. 4:15; Matt. 13:19; Lk. 8:12). It can therefore be assumed that some kind of link exists between the external evil power and human’s interior concupiscence. This shows clearly the radical nature of concupiscence, and is apparent in 1 Cor. 7:5 (see also Jn. 8:41–4). The same conclusion can be drawn from the Old Testament materials. Indeed, except in Ps. 132:13–14, *’vh* in the piel is always connected with *nephesh* (soul) as its subject.⁴¹ The words *’avvah* and *havvah*

37 It is interesting to note that Pannenberg has said practically nothing on the subject of original state in *Anthropology*, though it has finally managed to attract his attention in *Systematic Theology* with a section titled “The Image of God and Our First Estate”.

38 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:212.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 214.

41 The word “desire” is reflected in the Hebrew Scripture primarily by the roots *’vh* and *hmd*. Notwithstanding the similarities between them, the latter tends to be used in the context of inspection and the former imagination. To put it another way, the meaning of *hmd* equates to the English expression “have one’s eye on something”. It refers to the desire that comes

appear only in connection with *nephesh*, while *ta'avah* is used with *nephesh* (Isa. 26:8; Ps. 10:3), *lebh* (heart) in Ps. 21:3, and *'adham* (man) in Prov. 19:22. Thus, it is clear that concupiscence is not exhausted by a mere exercise of the will; rather, it is rooted deep in human existence. It not only precedes all human acts as a power that dwells in us, as indicated above, but it also possesses us like our own subjectivity as it overpowers us. This radical nature of concupiscence is located at a deeper level than the individual act, deeper than any transgression.

Sin in the Perspective of Openness to the World

In their openness to the world, human beings are on the way to becoming what we are intended to be. The essence of humanity is seen not as something that is always and everywhere already realised, but rather as something that is to characterise all the manifestations of human life insofar as human beings are to be human and live in keeping with our goal as human. The essential concept of a human person is, therefore, an “ought” concept, which is operative in the exocentric structure of this life. Pannenberg reminds us, “Human beings are given their ‘what they are’, but only in the form of a task still to be completed.”⁴² Yet we are unable to find the unquestionable ultimate purpose to which all the individual decisions of our life might be subordinated. It always drives us onwards, for the question about human destiny does not allow humans to be satisfied with provisional answers. This unending movement into the open is directed towards God, beyond everything that confronts humans in the world, so that openness to the world essentially means openness to God. To the extent that we are on the path towards our destiny, towards God, communion with God is already actualised in this movement, and the destiny of humanity already becomes effective and a reality in this life. However, the fact is that we strive to assert ourselves and to prevail, thereby interrupting repeatedly our course through the world towards God. In other words, we fail to live in a constant movement beyond ourselves in openness to the world. Instead, each person is the centre of his world: “Man not only has a tendency to break out into the open, but he also has a tendency toward a certain self-enclosurement.”⁴³ Pannenberg also observes that every organic body simultaneously lives within itself and outside itself. Although to do so involves a contradiction, it is a contradiction that really exists in life.

In the opinion of Pannenberg, if the peculiarity of human beings among the higher animals is described correctly as an objectivity that is open to the world and helps humans achieve distance from ourselves and thus self-consciousness or reflection on ourselves, then such a description calls for a clarification of human identity in terms of the twofold reference of human self-consciousness that corresponds to the tension between centrality and exocentricity. In other words, the issue is about how human beings, who are unified living entities, exist in view of our centralised organisation, which we share with the higher animals, and our exocentricity. As Pannenberg points

from seeing something beautiful, whereas *'vh* expresses the desire that arises from an inner human need.

42 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 108.

43 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 56.

out, in our pre-given existential structure all human beings are determined by the centrality of the ego. We experience ourselves individually as the centre of our world. We experience time and space relative to our ego as to the centre of our world. It is obvious, then, what deep roots egocentricity has in our natural organisation and in our sensible perception. Self-consciousness manifests a dominance of the centrality aspect of human organisation, which reaches its highest point in the central ego, over the exocentricity element in the definition of the human. In any act of sin, Pannenberg says, “The central ego turns exocentricity, or the capacity for objectivity that is open to the world, into a means in the service of its own ends.”⁴⁴

Destined to openness but driven to self-assertion, Pannenberg describes the human experience as an irresolvable tension, which continually leads to conflict and threatens our becoming blind to our destiny. However, life is possible only where the two poles of this tension – self-centredness and openness to the world – are held together by an encompassing unity. We cannot solve this conflict ourselves, as the unity that ties them together into a meaningful whole can have its basis only outside the ego. We would need to have our centres outside ourselves in order to be able to overcome that conflict. Through our technological domination over nature and our intellectual constructs, we mistakenly attempt to resolve it by extending our own ego until it embraces the totality of all accessible experiences within itself. However, this universal extension of the ego cannot succeed, for the ego can never take everything into itself – it cannot bring the whole scope of reality under the realm of its dominion and consciousness. On our own, we cannot attain harmony and rest, for we cannot achieve the unity of the self on our self-consciousness, on our own finitude. Our human existence is posited by the Eternal as a relation to the Eternal. In agreement with Kierkegaard, Pannenberg states, “Self-fulfillment on the basis of our finitude is a perversion of the basic relation that the Infinite and Eternal has posited and that makes our existence a relation to the Infinite and Eternal.”⁴⁵ Thus, we cannot be righteous before God on the basis of our finite subjectivity and by our own action. The unity of the whole of reality, which humans carry out progressively through our intellectual and technological dominion over the world, does not have its basis in ourselves, but only in God. The quest for human unity, therefore, becomes the question of transcendence, of the One in whom the unity of reality has its basis.

Pannenberg contends, “By warranting the unity of the world as the Creator, the one God also warrants salvation, that is, the wholeness of our existence in the world, which surmounts the conflict between selfhood and openness to the world.”⁴⁶ His vision of wholeness entails the overcoming of this natural conflict, but only if the ego is present as independent of God while drawing its identity from its position beyond itself in God. It is worth stressing that human beings on our own do not produce this wholeness, even though it becomes a theme inevitably in the formation of an independent individual identity. To the extent that we strive to gain our wholeness through self-realisation, it would turn itself to be an expression of sin. Instead, human beings can attain wholeness only in the form of salvation that is

44 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 106.

45 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:248.

46 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 62.

promised and given by God. By asking the question about God, we seek our destiny beyond the world, yet always remain related to the world. The harmony between the ego and the whole of reality can be received only from God. Nevertheless, since we lack a direct relation to the infinite, we pervert our relation to God through the worship of images of finite creatures. This throws the ego back upon itself. Unable to live in openness to God's truth, we trap ourselves in the conflict between openness and selfhood. Indeed, we remain imprisoned in our selfhood. We close ourselves off from the God who summons us to our destiny. Thus, *the selfhood that is closed up within itself is sin*. As Stock sums up cogently, it is the aim of Pannenberg "to show that the religious expression 'sin' marks a real and fundamental problem of the specific human behaviour, namely, the real 'break of the I with itself'."⁴⁷ This break can also be considered as a contradiction of the human being with himself – he sins even though, having received the breath or spirit of life, he ought to know God instead of worshipping idols or himself. In his usual anthropological tone, Pannenberg points out that "if its self-centredness dominates its self-transcendent activity in such a way that it can no longer become a member of more comprehensive spiritual integrations, the drive towards self-transcendent integration itself becomes disruptive and divisive."⁴⁸ It follows that even though every human being shares in the life-giving breath of the divine Spirit, this offers no guarantee that in our self-centredness we may not turn evil.

As with Augustine, Pannenberg identifies the core of sinful self-centredness as self-love, the elevation of the ego as the final purpose towards which everything else is related. This defines sin essentially as a structural rather than exclusively a moral phenomenon. By structural sin, is meant that it results from the reversal of the end-means structure in the human relation to the world. Sin cannot be limited to the transgression of moral laws, as self-love is not primarily immoral but is the falsification of the natural conditions of human existence. As Wenz puts it precisely, "the empirical orientation of Augustinian hamartiology makes it possible to explain the sinful perversion in the constitution of the human self not simply as moral corruption, but as the universal fact of a perversion of the human relation to the world."⁴⁹ Self-love prevents us from turning to other persons for their own sake, and hinders us in loving God for his own sake. The human person turns to himself, insofar as he uses everything else as a means to achieve the ends of the self, thereby turning away from God and against the love of God. This is at the same time a reflection of the refusal of the person to acknowledge God as God. Under such circumstances, God would be seen as a hindrance to self-realisation, and other fellow humans would only be viewed either as hindrances to his desire or, even worse, as objects of self-gratification. As a result, everything else in the world would be reduced to its value for the ends of the self.

47 Konrad Stock, "Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?", *Evangelische Theologie*, 45 (1985): 292–3.

48 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Spirit and Mind", in Richard Q. Elvee (ed.), *Mind in Nature*, Nobel Conference XVII (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 148.

49 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 145.

Sin asserts itself on the one hand in unbelief by denying God the reverence and trust due to him,⁵⁰ and on the other in the greed by which a human person makes himself a slave of the things for which he strives. His devotion to what stands opposite him becomes the most refined means for self-assertion. The self becomes the infinite basis and reference point for all objects, thereby usurping the place of God. Pannenberg attributes this unrestricted self-affirmation to “the implicit form of the absolute self-willing that alienates us from God by putting the self in the place that is God’s alone, even though the relation to God is not an object of decision.”⁵¹ In a similar way, Pannenberg states in *Grundlagen der Ethik* that unrestricted self-determination (*unbeschränkte Selbstverfügung*) without relation to God is an expression of human sinfulness.⁵²

However, Pannenberg adamantly stresses in *What is Man?*, “In and of itself, selfhood is not sin, any more than control over the world – with which the ego asserts itself and prevails – is sin.”⁵³ Selfhood in the positive form of independence belongs to the goal of creation, as exemplified by the Son incarnate in Jesus. Three decades later, the same view is echoed in his *Systematic Theology*: “In this self-centredness of life, have we not been created by God as beings that to a particularly high degree are capable of independence and dominion over our environment? ... we may not say that the self-centredness of life is itself sinful. Nor does it stand in simple opposition to our distinct destiny of elevation above everything finite, including our own finitude, for this movement of life is constitutive for the I itself.”⁵⁴ While Pannenberg has said repeatedly that self-centredness itself is not sinful, there are specific instances pointing to the contrary: for example, “The image of the individual who takes himself or herself to be the center of his or her life aptly describes the structure of sin.”⁵⁵ Presumably because of this ambivalence, Pannenberg at times feels compelled to remind us of his position that self-centredness per se is not a sin. To be sure, this lack of clarity and consistency as to when self-centredness is a sin and when it is not can easily be rectified by using a different term, perhaps self-closedness, to assume the meaning of sinful self-centredness. But, leaving aside the terminological problem, why is Pannenberg not prepared to condemn all forms of self-centredness? Or, to be more precise, why does he only link to the theme of sin the self-centredness of human conduct, the self-centredness that is enclosed in itself and its secular possessions, but not the self-centredness as such?

50 Buller rightly interprets Pannenberg’s view that “sin is the failure to trust and love God as the one who will bring creation to completion. The power of sin lies in its ability to deceive us into believing that this fullness is possible apart from trust in God.” See Cornelius A. Buller, *The Unity of Nature and History in Pannenberg’s Theology* (Maryland: Littlefield Adams, 1996), pp. 176–7.

51 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:261.

52 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik: Philosophisch–Theologische Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 112.

53 Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 64.

54 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:260.

55 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 26.

As creatures that attain full independence, we must develop and become what we are and ought to be. In the process, we can all too easily give our independence the form of an autonomy in which we usurp the place in the order of the universe that belongs solely to God. This sinful self-centredness can be seen as “the cost of the creaturely independence at which God’s creative action aims.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, as Pannenberg explains, “The Christian idea of man as commissioned to act in the image of God places him near God, as Jewish faith does, over against the rest of the world. This constitutes the element of independence in his freedom.”⁵⁷ In addition, Pannenberg writes in a 1975 essay, “The independence of the individual ... thus has, as we say, its origin in Christianity, in the Christian view of the infinite value of every individual human being for God.”⁵⁸ More importantly, he argues in *Systematic Theology* that “without creaturely independence the relation of the Son to the Father cannot manifest itself in the medium of creaturely existence.”⁵⁹ Elsewhere, he elaborates, “Indeed, the human being is created not only independent in relation to the other creatures, but also in relation to God. Otherwise, he could not thank God freely and praise him, and the reality of a human life could not become the medium of the free obedience of the Son to the Father. And, yet the human being, especially in such creaturely independence, remains as God’s creature.”⁶⁰

Thus, a genuinely free will necessarily carries with it the liability to sin. However, without freedom of choice, with its built-in liability, human beings would lack the capacity to choose to live rightly. In other words, the possibility of sin is risked and its reality is endured and overcome to achieve the appearance of the relation of the Son to the Father. All creation is destined to participate in the relation of the Son to the Father. Apart from creaturely independence, human creatures cannot come to participate in the eternal love of the Son and the Father through the Spirit. The basis of human independence lies in the self-differentiation of the Son from the Father, as revealed in Jesus, who is indeed the paradigm of true independence and the bearer of the human destiny, namely to exist in the full image of God. More specifically, Pannenberg writes, “Because all creatures owe their independent existence to the creative activity of the Son in virtue of his self-distinction from the Father ..., the nature of the Logos can find expression to some extent in all creatures. He can do so in us humans to a higher degree than in other creatures because we are able and destined to distinguish God from ourselves and ourselves from God, so that the self-distinction of the Son from the Father can take shape in us.”⁶¹

Returning to the main theme of our discussion, rather than positing an original state and a fall at the beginning of human history, Pannenberg locates the source of sin in the conditions of human existence. As mentioned above, self-centredness or

56 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:264.

57 Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*, p. 25.

58 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christliche Anthropologie und Personalität”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:156.

59 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:265.

60 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität – Eine Antwort an Thomas Pröpper”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:241.

61 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:385.

egocentricity does not simply make its appearance in the area of moral behaviour; rather, it determines the whole way in which we experience the world. As such, sin is not only or first of all something moral, but is closely associated with the natural conditions of our existence. In this respect, Stock rightly interprets that “not only the moral transgression is sinful, but so is every wrongdoing rooted in a fundamental brokenness of the human form of existence; unlike the previous theological doctrine of sin, Pannenberg wants to make clear ‘the character of the will of sin and its rooting in the natural conditions of human existence as a standard fact’. It is also necessary to show that the ‘initial position’ of a natural centrality perpetuates sinful behaviour.”⁶² We, therefore, need to distinguish between the actuality of human existence and the final destiny of humanity. The former is characterised by the universality of sin in that the egocentricity of human behaviour denies the fundamental exocentricity of human life. Although Pannenberg places emphasis on the dominance of egocentricity over exocentricity as constituting human sin, it would be incorrect to conclude from this that he sees the presence of this structure itself as sin. Wenz has a similar reading of Pannenberg’s text, for he writes, “This tension [between centrality and exocentricity] is indeed not in itself already manifested perversion, but merely an indicator of ambivalence as well as ambiguity that is inherent in the human structure of existence. It marks in its ambiguity the enigmatic horizon of a possible and actual conflict between the central form of organisation and human exocentricity, which is the epitome of all sinful discord.”⁶³ It is, therefore, misleading for Worthing to state that “ego-centeredness is universal in that it is already present in all persons as sinfulness before they commit a single actual sin.”⁶⁴ Instead, sin arises out of the tension in the interplay of two natural human drives, egocentricity and exocentricity, or, as discussed earlier, self-centredness and openness to the world. Thus, it is sin insofar as it falls into conflict with the infinite destiny of humanity, or as the ego adheres to itself rather than letting itself be inserted into a higher unity of life, beyond the individual and the community to the origin of the whole of reality. To the extent that this tension between egocentricity and exocentricity is seemingly unavoidable, sin is something that belongs to human givenness.

Sin as Passivity to Destiny and Human Creatureliness

On this “human givenness”, Pannenberg asks, “If *sin* is anchored in the natural conditions of human existence, then is not human nature as such already ‘sinful’?”⁶⁵ In other words, if human beings are sinners by nature, if human life in its natural origin is already characterised by the structure of sinfulness, does it mean that human essence is sinful? This potent question brings us back inevitably to the wider issue of responsibility for sin. The problem of individual responsibility arises with every

62 Stock, “Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?”, p. 293.

63 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 143.

64 Mark William Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science: Theological Method and Apologetic Praxis in Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Rahner* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 191.

65 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 107.

attempt to give credibility to a universal sinfulness that precedes individual acts. Before proceeding any further, it is noteworthy at the beginning that Pannenberg makes a bold move not to absolve God of responsibility for the appearance of sin in human creation. He claims, “Concern to absolve the Creator has been a mistake in Christian theodicy.”⁶⁶ He argues incisively, “Responsibility for the coming of evil into creation unavoidably falls on the God who foresees and permits it, even though creaturely action is the immediate cause.”⁶⁷ In other words, Pannenberg stops short of saying that God creates sin. Insofar as sin is the result of a free decision on the part of the doer and the freedom itself is a work of the Creator, it is hard to disagree with Pannenberg that God is *in some way* responsible for sin. While creatures may be free, even in their freedom they are still God’s creatures. Pannenberg continues, “if the Creator wanted free and independent creatures that can spontaneously acknowledge him in his deity, and thus correspond for their part to the fellowship of the Son with the Father that is realised in Jesus, the decision to create carried with it the risk of a misuse of this creaturely freedom.”⁶⁸ To put it another way, God accepts the risk of sin as a condition of realising the goal of a free fellowship of creatures with himself. In addition, as Pannenberg says, “by ordaining his creation for independence, God took a risk himself, the risk that the autonomy of his creatures would make him seem to be nonessential and even nonexistent.”⁶⁹ Nonetheless, God stands by his creation in a way that respects his creatures’ independence. The pros and cons of creaturely independence were elucidated earlier. However, we cannot stress enough that sin is not an object of God’s will; rather, it is an accompanying phenomenon, an unwanted by-product of creaturely freedom. The permitting of sin is a condition of the realising of his purpose for creatures, and comes within the realm of divine providence, which brings good out of evil, being oriented to the reconciliation and redemption of the world through Jesus Christ.

Sin is real and costly for God himself as well as for creatures. Our ability to choose among different possibilities of willing and doing is a high form of creaturely independence, but it is also a very fragile form, for this very independence can easily be lost upon the actual use of such ability, resulting in our enslavement to the evils of sin and death. Insofar as human sufferings are generated in the transition from God-given independence to radical self-independence, creaturely independence is in fact the source of sufferings that human creatures bring upon themselves beyond the measure of their finitude. For the autonomous creatures, self-independence always conceals dependence on God. However, God does not shirk the responsibility for the appearance of sin in human creation, but shoulders it by sending and giving up his Son to the cross. Thus, in and with the crucifixion of his Son, God accepts and bears responsibility for the work that he has created. For Pannenberg, the crucifixion makes plain how costly sin is: “Evil may be null and void for his creative will, but this nullity is sealed only by his victory over it in the event of reconciliation and

66 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:166.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

69 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:643.

in the eschatological consummation of creation.”⁷⁰ However, even then creaturely independence will not end, for it will remain the condition of the mutuality of eschatological glorification in which creatures are not only glorified, but also for their part glorify Jesus Christ and the Father.

As for human responsibility, the question arises as to whether the premise of “formal” freedom facing alternatives is needed in order to establish responsibility, and therefore sin and guilt. Some might argue that it is not necessary that those who choose be indifferent to the possibilities of choice before actually choosing. The only requirement is that they may choose differently regarding either possibility and that this means the possibility of choosing evil vis-à-vis the good.⁷¹ Echoing what we said earlier on the interpretation of the fall that the divine prohibition presupposes a sin which is not yet sin, but which is also no longer pure innocence, Pannenberg states that a will that can choose differently when face to face with the norm of the good is already not a good will.⁷² Indeed, Overbeck sees rightly, “The call of freedom always leads onto the agreement of human behaviour to his own real destiny. That is why, for Pannenberg, there is no freedom in the face of the good or in the face of God. The freedom of the will always leads onto the good, and if the human being chooses the bad, then it is because in the non-freedom of his will he regards the objectively bad as the good.”⁷³

Thus, a will that can choose other than the good is more than weak, as the will is emancipated from commitment to the good, or engages in “the negativity of a ‘refusal’ of the ‘absolute resolution to the good’ that is assumed to be possible.”⁷⁴ For this reason, it will not suffice to appeal to an act of free choice to resolve the responsibility issue, for the will that can choose other than the good is already entangled in evil: “In other words, if Eve listened to the insinuations of the serpent, and if Adam ate the apple rendered to him, then an ‘inclination toward sin’ must have already been in existence.”⁷⁵ After all, we have already shown that Pannenberg does not believe in original perfection. We have to be careful not to confuse responsibility for a disposition that comes to expression in acts with responsibility for an individual act. This explains why Stock suggests, quite rightly so, “Responsibility can be thought neither within the scope of the concept of freedom of indifference nor in the sense of the category of causality.”⁷⁶ As a matter of fact, even in the Bible the human responsibility for sin is not based on any freedom of indifference. Freedom in

70 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:169.

71 To be more precise, the choice is whatever they regard as good. The idea of a choice against the good or God is a contradiction in terms. We do not actually say no to God, but to false conceptions of what God is or what he wills, based upon faulty or incomplete understanding. As Pannenberg puts it succinctly, “die eigene Beteiligung am Tun der Sünde gründet nicht in einer ‘Wahl des Bösen als Bösen’” (“Sünde, Freiheit, Identität”, p. 238).

72 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:258.

73 Franz-Josef Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch: Eine systematische Untersuchung zur Bestimmung des Menschen und zur “Selbstverwirklichung” Gottes in der Anthropologie und Trinitätstheologie Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), p. 134.

74 Pannenberg, “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität”, p. 238.

75 Pannenberg, “Aggression und die theologische Lehre von der Sünde”, p. 229.

76 Stock, “Ist die Bestimmung der Person noch offen?”, p. 294.

the New Testament sense is not conceived as something that humans have from the beginning or by their nature, but as an effect of the redemptive presence of Christ or the Spirit (John 8:36; 2 Cor. 3:17). Indeed, the fellowship with God mediated through Christ can mean redemption only on the condition that we thus become free.

“The matter appears differently”, however, as Wenz articulates, “if the concept of responsibility is developed not by the formal concept of indifferent freedom, but by the idea of material freedom, which is orientated to the correspondence between human behaviour and human destiny.”⁷⁷ In other words, sin has to be understood as human weakness relative to our destiny. Even though sin is bound up with our existence, we are responsible for it, insofar as we lack the courage to accept the conditions of human existence in the light of our knowledge of human destiny and to accept these conditions as something that must be overcome. Pannenberg claims that human beings “always have as their starting point an initial natural situation, that is, the natural conditions of their existence, which in the process of self-transcendence they likewise transcend inasmuch as they come back to them and alter them in the light of their experience of the world.”⁷⁸ By creating culture, human beings as exocentric beings are to impose a new form on the pre-given conditions of their existence, thereby transcending them. In other words, the limitations imposed by their natural conditions are by no means insurmountable, and human beings must overcome them if they are to live their lives in a way befitting their nature and destiny as human beings. It is important to bear in mind that God could not give human creatures all things without making them gods. It would involve contradiction to demand that God should have created creatures without creaturely limits. Limitations form a necessary part of creatureliness to the extent that every creature is different from God and his perfection. Hence, a human being must resist not giving up to his ego, or must not be left to himself in the tendency of the self to close up within itself. Sin passes from Adam to all other human beings insofar as we cannot free ourselves from it. We believe that the Genesis account tells us that sin occurs only as the tempted person gives full reign to the egocentric structure, resulting in the destruction of the harmonious relationship enjoyed in the garden. Its theme is not the historical *origin* of sin, but the universal and irresistible *power* of sin as affecting the being of humanity. In addition, the narrative is not about the inevitability of sin, but rather, especially viewed in contrast to Jesus’ victory over temptation, it is about the lack of courage of human beings to accept our finite nature in the face of temptation and to understand the destructive results of sin.

We engage in sin, for it promises us life. However, in so doing it deceives us; in truth it brings death, which is the last enemy of all living things (1 Cor. 15:26). Fear of death pierces deep into life, for it not only robs us of the power to accept life, but it also causes us to indulge in unrestricted self-affirmation. For Pannenberg, “the nonacceptance of our own finitude makes the inescapable end of finite existence a manifestation of the power of death that threatens us with nothingness. The fear of death also pushes us more deeply into sin.”⁷⁹ However, despite sin’s deception, our

77 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 151.

78 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 112.

79 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:273.

voluntary committing of it is enough to make us guilty. Sin is not a fate that comes upon the human being as an alien power against which he is helpless. It is not a tragic disaster that eliminates responsibility and certainly not a plague that befalls him apart from his own will: "And indeed, he [the sinner] cannot simply distance himself from his sin, as if he had nothing to do with it; for he agrees to it and sins with joy."⁸⁰ We would say that sin is of no more importance in a human life than man consents to allow it to be. Even for Augustine, "the sinfulness of the desire resides not in the desire itself but in one's *consent* to it ... where consent involves either forming an intention to act in accordance with the desire or, at a minimum, failing to suppress the desire."⁸¹ In that sense, the general conviction is correct that sin is located in the will. This is valid even though sin has its roots in the natural conditions of human existence. Pannenberg writes, "The will is thus that wherein here and now we correspond or do not correspond to our destiny."⁸² We argue, therefore, that *for Pannenberg, sin is essentially passivity to destiny or weakness to destiny*. Although Pannenberg has not classified sin as such, for all intents and purposes this is what his arguments lead us to. In other words, our expression of sin as passivity to human destiny, which is to be presented below, is on the whole in fundamental accord with Pannenberg's theology. As suggested earlier, the will is perfectly capable of transcending the natural conditions of human existence. Any claim that sin is rooted in nature contradicts its connection with the will. Even if sin in human beings comes from their created nature, it comes only because they fail to achieve their destiny to be the image of God. For Pannenberg, "when human beings do not accept the self-transcendence which their destiny requires of them, or accept it only in the form of its distortion, they are perpetuating their initial existential state in relation to their destiny as human beings."⁸³ Sin is, therefore, all human willing and acting that is in opposition to the divine will, the divinely given destiny. As a matter of fact, it is sin even when it is not known, willed and done as sin.⁸⁴ "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are" (Rom. 2:1). When we see our sin, we must accept ourselves as guilty. Sin as a great mystery may not be explained or casually interpreted, but at least it can be confessed. Paradoxically, we can argue that only those who understand that sin is inexplicable know what it means and what it is. Sin is one great mystery of human existence, of which we are only certain of one thing, that we are responsible for it, without the possibility of pushing the responsibility onto anything outside ourselves. Incomprehensible as it is, yet it is known to us all in the depths of our being.

80 Pannenberg, "Sünde, Freiheit, Identität", p. 235.

81 William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin", in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 45.

82 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 108.

83 Ibid.

84 On the issue of the knowledge of sin as sin, the law obviously has a role to play in that it reveals the opposition of concupiscence to God's will and thereby to the human destiny. Initially, this opposition is present only implicitly in concupiscence. Only through the law do human beings become conscious of it. Yet it is only through the cross of Christ, the cross of the One whom God has raised up thus putting the stamp of approval on his mission, that this opposition is revealed in its full depth and universality.

Were we to express sin as passivity to our destiny, several features would be brought to the fore. First, it means that we as human beings owe it to ourselves – that is, to the true self of our as yet unrealised destiny – to correspond to the destiny of ours. We see sin as sin before God, and therefore in relation to the human destiny that has been reflected in Christ. In other words, the concept of passivity as sin is to be understood in the perspective of the human destiny that has its ground in God and has been revealed in Christ. In this case, the dignity of the human destiny becomes a judgement on our unworthy conduct. Through our consciousness of our own destination, we know ourselves to be responsible for our own condition and activity and for turning the natural and social givens of our own life situation into a fulfilment of our destiny. Our consciousness that this destiny is really ours justifies our acceptance of responsibility for the fact that our existence and behaviour are still far removed from the goal. It lends us the strength to accept our own reality, and justifies a consciousness of obligation with reference to what ought to be. The consciousness of the failure of the self, namely sin, is a necessary phase in the process whereby humans are liberated to become themselves and to identify themselves with those qualities within them which they judge to be incompatible with their selfhood.

In this sense, all responsibility is responsibility to the self. Sin is, therefore, a failure of the self, not of God or of some anonymous structure or system. In radically denying its human essence to be open through the world to God, the self turns away from God and refutes the basis of the self as God. This view is reiterated many times in the Scripture. The source of evil does not lie outside of a person, in impure things, but inside a person, in the impure heart (Mark 7:15). The thought of the wickedness of the heart undoubtedly points behind and beyond the individual act, as do the ideas of guilt and revolt. Thus, the psalmist prays for a clean heart (51:10), and Jeremiah (32:39) and Ezekiel (11:19; 36:26) hope that in the coming age of salvation God will give us a new and different heart that will not contend against his commands. Such Old Testament view of the corruption of the heart seems to have underpinned the Pauline theology reflected in Romans 7. In line with this view, Pannenberg believes, “We have to recognize that the evil of sin is our own evil, whether as our own act or as the power that dwells within us (Rom. 7:17). Sin has its origin in the individual ‘heart’. To explain the universality of sin in terms of the social nexus fails to make this point, even though we still find a place for an inclination to sin in each individual.”⁸⁵ Only with the consent of the individual will does the evil influence of society become the sin of the individual. To take the argument further, it is neither want and oppression, nor the frailty and corruptibility of life, but human conduct, and therefore human self, that contradicts our destiny. Wenz presents concisely, “Such perverted striving always characterises a self-perverted fixation on one’s own self, which underlies ‘the search for confirmation through others’ as well as the diverse forms of aggression. In addition, this fixation on the self is equally at the mercy of and a slave to the extremes of self-idolisation and of despaired self-hatred.”⁸⁶

The manifold reality that impinges on us opens life up for us again and again. Responsibility to God can be asserted meaningfully as a particular form of

85 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:256.

86 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 149.

responsibility to the self on the basis that the true selfhood, the destiny, of human beings is grounded in God and can be achieved only by his power. In the course of our identity formation, we either find or miss the structures of meaning that are constitutive of selfhood. In our sin, we are robbed of our true identity, and the separation of sinners from God means at the same time our separation from our own destiny, which is communion with God. As such, freedom means that humans allow their actions to be determined by the call of their selfhood. In other words, the goal that determines freedom is one's own self. The call of freedom is always to a harmonisation of man's behaviour with his own destiny. This call is the basis of a freedom to do good, not of a freedom to choose between good and evil. As already explained, what is chosen is possible to be not the good, but the evil instead. In addition, just as there is no freedom against the good, there is no freedom against God as the ground of one's own future selfhood and thus as the very embodiment of all that is good. Of course, humans can and do close themselves against God as well as against the good, but this closure does not take the form of a direct confrontation. In other words, sinful human behaviour does not *begin* with a conscious turning from God. As a matter of fact, the turning from God takes place indirectly as an implication of our human willing of the self when we put the self in the place that is properly God's. When God is rejected, he is rejected because of either the false impression that the idea of God is merely a human construct or the doubt as to whether this in fact represents God's will. Thus, the rebellion against God is normally made indirectly, subconsciously, or simply out of complete ignorance. It is only in the retrospective confession of our guilt that we sinners might be able to recognise that our sinful behaviour is against God, against our human destiny. In many cases, the estrangement from God occurs in an obscure manner and can remain for long periods more or less unnoticed, being simply implicit in the distortion of our relation to the world and to ourselves. Pannenberg writes, "We indeed suffer the consequence of a life in anxiety, unbridled desire, and aggressiveness, but only in encounter with the God of historical revelation may we say that this unnatural manner of life is sin against God and in so doing identify unbelief as its root."⁸⁷ Arguably, even Satan is only indirectly against God. The root of Satan's evil is his desire to make himself God. Faced with the impossibility of actualising such desire and yet still entangled in boundless self-love, Satan then develops a hatred of God as well as all that God has created.

The radical nature of sin as passivity to human destiny comes into full expression when we see that sin has no thesis in itself, but only antithesis, which is evident in the very heart of every human being as a sinner. Sin is a frightening reality that is opposed not only to the whole meaning of life, but also to the real essence of humanity. The destructive and tragic character of sin has to be seen in this light. In the biblical account of creation, we see a sin whose essential traits are manifested subsequently in every sin again and again. Human sinfulness is expressed in sloth, standing apart, defection and apostasy from fellowship with God and the assumption of the human being's own way. It results from a combination of a misapprehension of God's love, stubbornness in one's own heart, and a misconstruing of the whole

87 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:252.

purpose of one's life. Such human sinfulness is not simply something that happened once for all, and is already over and behind us; rather, it is recurring continually with no signs of abating. Moreover, sin is not merely an occasional, perhaps even a frequent, act, always arising out of the wrong decision of the moment on the part of human beings, but a perverted tendency of their whole nature. This view is not only compatible with but also does justice to Pannenberg's idea that "sin, being the failure to achieve this destiny, destroys human identity."⁸⁸ In other words, sin causes damage to more than just one minor aspect of humanness. If the being of humans is connected with our as yet unfulfilled destiny, sin would take us away from the future to which we are destined and to which we are meant to be on the way.

As passivity, sin refers to omissions as much as actions and thereby for the entire state in which human beings find themselves, insofar as they do not correspond to their destiny. This concept of responsibility avoids placing one-sided emphasis on actions, and instead points to the totality of sin. With sin extending to the concept of omissions, the divergence between being a sinner or not and being morally evil or not becomes all the more obvious. In most cases, a human being who omits to do something is not seen as morally evil. Likewise, it is not contradictory to combine being a sinner with being ethically good.⁸⁹ After all, according to the New Testament, it is perfectly reasonable to expect prostitutes and tax collectors to enter the kingdom of God before those righteous Pharisees with impeccable behaviour. The crucial point is that the morally good are often tempted to evade the truth that they too are sinners. However, to be fair, we cannot deny that what is considered morally good tends to be more likely to correspond with the will of God than what is morally bad. Understood in this way, sin is amoral, a view that is also shared by Augustine and Pannenberg.

So far we have discussed sin as concupiscence/pride for Augustine, sin as self-centredness for Pannenberg, and sin as passivity in our case. Each aims to define sin in a way that tries to capture the richness of the concept. In other words, each attempts to embrace the totality of sin rather than its individual manifestations. But does each one *on its own* give an adequate description of our sin? Can other expressions do just as well, if not better?

First, we believe that sin as pride leads to a biased presentation and a failure to appreciate the multiplicity of the meaning of sin. This view of sin, which originates from Augustine and is supported by other theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and indeed Pannenberg himself, is unnecessarily and unrealistically restrictive. We do not deny that there is a tendency among human beings to strive for self-gratification almost at any price, and that pride elevates a human person beyond his particularity, thereby making him universal on the basis of his particularity. This is the temptation of a human being in his position between finitude and infinity. His "poverty" makes him seek for abundance. The possibility, however remote it may be, of reaching unlimited abundance is the temptation of a human being who is a self and has a world. In short, the copy of the image of God wants to be the model itself. This is applicable to anything from physical hunger to sex, to fashion, to knowledge, to

88 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 142.

89 On Pannenberg's view of what is ethical in the Christian sense, see the final section of Chapter 5.

technology, to power, as well as to material wealth. However, one only needs to ask oneself, what about sin as self-abasement? Not surprisingly, the concept of sin as pride provokes a lot of criticisms from feminist theologians, who argue that in a male-dominated world the sin of the woman is often the exact opposite to pride. Goldstein believes that the feminine form of sin is “underdevelopment or negation of the self.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Dunfee argues that the primary form of sin for woman is the sin of hiding, which refers to “the escape from freedom – not *in* freedom – into nothingness.”⁹¹ Or, as Brunner puts it in his chapter “Man and Woman”, the woman “often forgets and inwardly abandons the freedom which so often she does not possess outwardly.”⁹² In all of these cases, sin is essentially one form or another of self-rejecting, which clearly stands in marked contrast to pride. Nevertheless, in a defiant mode, Pannenberg insists that “in Augustine *superbia* is not just one form of sin among others but a general structure that underlies all sins ... In Kierkegaardian terms, it might be regarded as a despairing not wanting to be oneself.”⁹³ Thus, it seems that Pannenberg has stretched the definition of pride way beyond its reasonable limits to force it to be all-encompassing.

Second, in his doctrine of sin, Pannenberg has been shrewd in identifying and making good use of the anthropological concept of exocentricity/openness to the world. However, while this does powerfully deepen our understanding of the reality of sin and its empirical universality, it unintentionally gives rise to the impression that sin as self-centredness is simply a matter of one natural human drive over another, or one centre over another. We argue that in this way sin would appear to be too innocuous, and the doctrine too reductionist. For it shows little sensitivity for the destructiveness and catastrophic character of our sin. In our sin, faith is denied, love is disavowed, boundaries are exceeded, and lies are proclaimed until the very “end”, when the truth of God will come to its full light. *Sin as self-centredness would turn the doctrine into merely an impersonal metaphysic of sin, however profound and empirical it may be, which is totally unrelated to the judgement and the wrath of God.* Sin is never a mere phenomenon or deficiency in human living. Rather, the whole character of sin has to be defined so personally that it consists simply in a personal relation, in the relation between God and the human being. In addition, sin as self-centredness falsely gives the fatal sense of the inevitable, when in fact sin must be conceived as wholly deliberate so that no natural element is admitted to appear as a ground of explanation.

By contrast, we argue that passivity to human destiny, as explained above, is sufficiently general and conceptual to be an all-inclusive expression of sin, and yet it

90 Valerie S. Goldstein, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View”, *Journal of Religion*, 40 (1960): 109.

91 Susan N. Dunfee, “The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Account of the Sin of Pride”, *Soundings*, 65 (1982): 320.

92 Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: RTS., Lutterworth, 1939), p. 354.

93 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:243, n.233. However, not everyone agrees to this interpretation of the Augustinian doctrine of sin. Mann suggests that “he [Augustine] is careful to insist that pride is not a component in all sins; as he points out, some sins are committed in ignorance or desperation” (“Augustine on Evil and Original Sin”, p. 47).

is concrete enough to be explicitly about the goal of human existence. Even so, the full weight of the term is only felt if we add in what way passivity occurs in relation to human destiny. Only then is sin revealed in its full concreteness. Thus, we must not stay away from other descriptions of sin, which include disobedience, rebellion, alienation, unbelief, unfaithfulness, ingratitude and pride. These descriptions should be seen as possible reasons for passivity to destiny, and ought to be viewed as mutually illuminating rather than distinctly separate or contradicting one another. As such, we should caution ourselves against a preference for any single term, for otherwise we would fail to appreciate the manifold forms in which sin is manifested. On the other hand, the centrality of the concept of sin as passivity sheds a powerful light on those various descriptions of sin, revealing their *common* true character and essence. In other words, despite the multiplicity of sin, there is always a common trait. While sin must be asserted as a universal presupposition and has, according to Pannenberg, an empirically verifiable universality, there is a further, crucial (albeit unthematic) aspect concealed in concupiscence or self-centredness or any other description of sin: sin is always against God or fellowship with God, and therefore against our human destiny. In other words, *within* a sinful act something is tragically lost. It is, indeed, this hidden factor that marks the radicalness of sin and reveals its true nature. Never can we understand fully the essence of sin and what it means to humanity, as long as we neglect the common, albeit hidden, trait. Sin is against our destiny in its origin and in its end. It has reality only as a deformation of our being, our essence, which is to realise our destiny.

It is only a short step from here to see that sin is in opposition to our creatureliness, our humanness.⁹⁴ We have already mentioned that the root of sin is to be found in revolt against the limit of finitude, in the refusal to accept one's own finitude and in the related illusion of being like God. Ironically, in denying the finitude of their own existence in trying to be as God, sinners are delivered up to death. In this respect, it is important to note the distinction between the desire to be as God that characterises human sin and fellowship, and as God that presupposes acknowledgement of his infinite superiority and his lordship over us. To put it another way, we need to make a distinction between the idea of a life after death that comes as a result of egoism without limit and the eternal life of the divine destiny that marks humanity from its very creation.

As argued at length in Chapter 2, having been created according to the image of God, human beings by nature are equipped with a predisposition to God. Indeed, for Pannenberg, even the excessiveness of humanity exhibits a positive dimension, in that it shows that "the human being is related beyond every finite measure to the infinite God."⁹⁵ This point of human religiosity is demonstrated and argued repeatedly over the course of the last two chapters. Thus, as a human person sins, he sets himself in opposition to his origin. It is this opposition which determines the contradiction in his nature. Sin is, therefore, a contradiction of the very constitution

94 Interestingly, as rightly pointed out by Christoph Schwöbel, any detailed treatment of human creatureliness is conspicuously absent in Pannenberg's *Anthropology*. See Schwöbel, "Theology in Anthropological Perspective?", *King's Theological Review*, 10:1 (1987): 25.

95 Pannenberg, "Die Maßlosigkeit des Menschen", p. 218.

of human beings, and presents itself as a logical impossibility. As the free rejection of an infinite good, sin is staggeringly irrational. From the cost/benefit standpoint, it is also the worst deal imaginable.

At the same time, as a sinner, a human person must be understood in the light of his destiny to be the image of God; that is, as one who is living in opposition to it. Only thus is it possible to understand human reality as a life in conflict between man's actual existence and his destiny. Viewed in this light, sin can be understood as a contradiction to his creatureliness, his humanness. In his sin, he abandons his own creatureliness and the glory of God, for he misapprehends the nobility of his creatureliness or the life of dependence on his Creator God. To sin is not simply to decide for an alternative lifestyle, as one more way of being creatures. Indeed, sin is thematised as a contradiction of human beings with themselves as well as an inner conflict in themselves. Such contradiction is not merely something contradictory in the human being, but rather refers to the whole person. Human beings ought to live their lives as the creatures that are called by God to be in accordance with their creaturely destiny, namely to realise the full image of God. They sin, therefore, if and when they take their destiny into their own hands, when they snatch it as their prey, for they cannot achieve it by human action. In other words, human beings sin when they either refuse or are unable to accept their own lives as a gift, to be thankful and to move on confidently to the future. Their destiny can be achieved only when they realise that they are distinct from God, and accept themselves as his creatures, in their finitude in contrast to his perpetuity. They can distinguish themselves from God only when they are lifted above themselves by the Spirit of God, and are thus enabled to accept their own finitude. When the distinction between God and creatures is recognised and honoured, the likeness of human creatures to God is most open to realisation. This amounts to accepting their finitude while at the same transcending their finitude of existence. As a result, human creatures are able to be in accordance with the will of God the Creator, who wills humanity's distinctiveness and finitude. When humans accept their finite existence that God has endowed them, they live it out as an existence that is not grounded in itself but owed to another. This is, indeed, the single most determining feature of exocentric beings.

Pannenberg claims, "The deeper and the clearer the self-differentiation from God ..., the deeper and closer the closeness to God and to one's own true self. The connection of the highest commitment to the question of God with the humility of the self-differentiation from God leads to the spiritual lack, which has heralded the complete fellowship with God."⁹⁶ As human beings, they have to be fashioned into the image of the Son, of his self-distinction from the Father, so that they participate in the fellowship of the Son with the Father. In the obedience of Jesus Christ the Son to the Father, Jesus humbles himself to the death of the cross, thereby overcoming the sin of Adam. Unlike the first man, Jesus has never fallen into the temptation of wanting to be like God, even though in his pre-existence, contrary to Adam, he was in the form of God. Thus, there is an antithetical correspondence between his act and that of Adam to the extent that Jesus Christ accepts distinction from God in his

⁹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Christologie und Theologie", *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21 (1975): 174-5.

subordination to the Father. Indeed, in the incarnation of the Son, creaturely existence not only in its distinction from God, but also in its destiny of fellowship with him, comes to fulfilment – to a prophetic fulfilment, as we have already discussed in Chapter 2.

According to Paul, ingratitude and unrighteousness prevent human beings from paying the Creator of the world the honour of his deity. For humans to show ingratitude for their undeserved gift of God's grace and protection in the form of taking everything for granted amounts to an expression of sin. This, however, is again rooted ultimately in the non-acceptance of their own finitude, which is connected with the structure of temporality in that their end, and with it their wholeness, is still ahead of them. That the end and totality of finite existence in time are still ahead of them characterises the situation in which sin actually arises. Unable to break free from their own finitude or to attain to eternity, the result is the desperate character of all their strivings for self-fulfilment on the basis of their finite existence. Yet one must not overlook the outworking of God's patience and grace as well as his divine providence. On the one hand, humans have to realise that they themselves are not capable of coming beyond themselves. Pannenberg rightly cautions that "the 'exocentric destiny' of the human being should not be described without question 'as a given task, so to speak' as if the human being could realise this destiny by himself. Rather, it is a question of his destiny, insofar as he is put to it by his Creator. Thus, the creaturely destiny, indeed, corresponds to a potential in the Dasein of the human being, but not necessarily also to the capability of realising this predisposition by himself."⁹⁷ Without marginalising the importance of human involvement, God's grace is a prerequisite in the realisation of human destiny. In more specific terms, Pannenberg argues, "The human being is constituted by his relation to the infinite, and he knows about himself as about this relation to the infinite. Although he knows about himself, he cannot place or realise himself, for his existence as the relation to the infinite can be realised only by the infinite God."⁹⁸ Thus, while he has a formal ability to choose, on the basis of his finite subjectivity and by his own action he cannot be righteous before God. In other words, on his own he cannot achieve his own identity.

On the other hand, the divine grace and providence work to such an effect that brings good out of evil, and that limits the extreme consequences of sin in order to make creaturely life possible under the limiting conditions that human beings face. This is necessary because they cannot escape from the demonic clutch and consequences of sin. Only divine mercy can pardon, and only the grace of God can bring hope in the midst of their predicament and dismal despair. The fact that this is *single-handedly* the work of divine grace accentuates the hopelessness and lostness of humanity. Using Pannenberg's example in the Genesis story about God's limiting the destructive results of sin, we see that "death is the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit, but the entry of death is delayed, so that what we now have is a limited life span. Similarly Cain, after murdering his brother, is protected, though his

97 Pannenberg, "Sünde, Freiheit, Identität", p. 237, n.2.

98 Pannenberg, "Aggression und die theologische Lehre von der Sünde", p. 229.

life is forfeited.”⁹⁹ Of course, no one deserves God’s grace. God would be behaving with perfect justice if he were to help no one at all, for humans turn away from him by their own will. All gifts of grace are acts of divine mercy. There is no reason why God should bring anyone all the way to perfection in this life unless he so desires, and it seems that he has not chosen to do so.

Moreover, human creation is linked to the divine work of the reconciling and redeeming of the world. Only the eschatological consummation of the world can demonstrate definitively the righteousness of God, and thereby his deity, in the work of creation. Indeed, a belief in creation that is not linked to hope of eschatological victory over the reality of evil and sin, which are related to finitude, can give no answer to the question of theodicy. For Pannenberg, finitude is so much part of creaturely life that it will not be set aside even by participation in the divine life.¹⁰⁰ Even in the consummation, creation remains created reality, for its distinction from God remains, though creatures continue to be bound to God. Thus, the failure to differentiate God from the forms of creaturely reality, and to glorify and thank him as God, is a sign and expression of human sin. Only by accepting their finitude as God-given can human beings attain the fellowship with God that is implied in their destiny of the image of God. As creatures of God, we are summoned to honour and thank him as God in distinction from everything creaturely. Only thus do creatures give God the glory that is his due as Creator. Pannenberg says, “As they thank God for their existence even in their perishing, in transcendence of their finitude they are in relation to the eternal will of God as Creator, and herein they participate in God’s imperishable glory.”¹⁰¹ “Let God be God” is the fundamental task of human beings. It comprises accepting their own status as creatures in submission to the Creator and trusting in the final eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God. For it is in acknowledging God as God and themselves as finite creatures that humans correspond most fully to their calling and participate most clearly in fellowship with God, which is their human destiny.

99 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:238.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

101 *Ibid.*, pp. 173–4.

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Chapter 5

Eschatology and Ethics in Human Destiny

One of the outstanding issues that has emerged repeatedly in our discussion and yet has not been studied fully is eschatology, or eschatological consummation. This idea has obvious relevance to human destiny. Our key objective in this chapter is to determine whether it is sufficient to describe Pannenberg's view as that which says, "human destiny is eschatological rather than ethical, though moral ramifications or consequences are not ruled out." In other words, is there anything more to this argumentation? Is it as conclusive as it seems? In order to address this issue adequately, we have to analyse the meaning of "eschatological" and "ethical" in turn. In earlier chapters, we have already covered some aspects of eschatology, especially in relation to resurrection, time and eternity. In this chapter, we are to focus on the other aspects, in particular, the kingdom of God, which seems to be the single most important eschatological theme for Pannenberg.

As for ethics, we are not to engage ourselves in specific ethical deliberations in this chapter. Rather, our task is to examine in Pannenberg how ethics should be formulated and what are its bases. What is the significance of Pannenberg's claim of universal validity for ethics? Is it simply that ethics has an eschatological foundation, which is the kingdom of God? This gives rise to another, albeit similar, question of the relation between ethics and dogmatics within Christian theology.

In an earlier review of Pannenberg's *Ethics*, Sedgwick rightly critiques, "It seems as if in his *Ethics*, and especially in his earliest lectures, Pannenberg wanted to challenge Ebeling on his view of the autonomy of the ethical, but had not yet thought out an alternative."¹ While it may be a long wait, the alternative that he has finally come up with, albeit no longer in response to Ebeling's view, is certainly worth waiting for. His proposal, as elucidated in the final section, is not only profound, but also methodologically systematic and consistent, whether or not one agrees with his hypothesis. This also implies that in this particular area Pannenberg has changed or, more precisely, matured over the years. Unfortunately, Pannenberg himself has not pinpointed explicitly how and why the change has come about or has become necessary. Commentators also simply delineate Pannenberg's prevailing views as if they have always been the same. Hence, the challenge of the remaining part of this chapter is to emphasise the changes, where they occur, before finally concluding on the eschatological/ethical question of human destiny.

1 Peter Sedgwick, "Review of *Ethics*", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 41 (1988): 403.

Is It a Moral Destiny?

To begin, we are to state our *initial* thoughts on the question in this section. After a detailed exposition of the relevant eschatological and ethical issues, we shall return at the end of this chapter to examine more closely the subject matter.

Even in our early discussion of sin, it should already be clear that sin, and therefore human destiny, is more than something to do with morality, according to Pannenberg. As interpreted by Overbeck, “this self-centredness as an expression of the human experience, to be the centre of his world, is for Pannenberg ... the fundamental core of sin, a human self-transgression, which cannot be understood in any way as something that is at first moral, but as something intertwined with the natural conditions of human existence.”² Indeed, Pannenberg begins his essay “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität” with the remark, “The Christian doctrine of sin is not only a theme of dogmatics ... in the history of the understanding of the nature of human subjectivity ... sin is not only the transgression of divine commandments, but also at the same time the failure of the creaturely human destiny to be in communion with God, therefore also the failure of one’s own identity, and thus of the freedom of the real selfhood.”³

Moreover, human destiny is not identical with the ideals of existence, which we as human beings devise for ourselves. Nor is it in the first instance about the virtue of leading a wise and just life. Rather, as Wenz rightly points out, “This goal of fulfilment is ... primarily the human fellowship with God and the participation in his wisdom and justice as well as in his incorruptible being.”⁴ As already discussed in Chapter 2, the recourse to human fellowship with God as part of the concept of the image of God indicates a rejection of the whole idea of human moral perfectibility through active self-enhancement, which is to be accomplished by human beings themselves. Both Herder and Pannenberg object to the idea of self-perfecting in the sense that one must not base one’s self-fulfilment on one’s own actions and resources. In other words, human destiny cannot be achieved by human beings themselves, but has to be grounded in external influences which activate an innate destination to humanness, ensured only by faith in divine providence for Herder and by Jesus Christ for Pannenberg. In either case, it represents a move away from a purely moral description of human life to an expression of human dependence on God’s grace. Pannenberg writes, “Self-realisation cannot be ascribed to the action of a finite subject, who ... is tied to the succession of time, so that the moment of action and the moment of the realisation of the goal of the action are separated. Human self-realisation is not conceivable as the effect of the acting human ego that precedes this event, but only as self-finding, as an indervivable fulguration of the self in the life

2 Franz-Josef Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch: Eine systematische Untersuchung zur Bestimmung des Menschen und zur “Selbstverwirklichung” Gottes in der Anthropologie und Trinitätstheologie Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), p. 133.

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität – Eine Antwort an Thomas Pröpper”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999–2000), 2:235.

4 Gunther Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenburgs Systematische Theologie: Ein einführender Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 140.

of the ego.”⁵ For Pannenberg, the goal for which human beings are destined is one they cannot reach by themselves. If they were able to accomplish their destiny by themselves, they would have to be already what they have still to become.

To put it another way, Pannenberg sums up aptly, “The question is then precisely whether our destiny relates primarily to a future life or is to be regarded primarily as the destiny for a moral life in the present world.”⁶ Here, Pannenberg differentiates himself sharply from Fichte and Kant, who both see it as a moral destiny. In particular, Pannenberg critiques that “he [Kant] gave material primacy to our moral destiny as against a destiny of future happiness, even though regarding the latter as a consequence of the former.”⁷ In other words, for Kant, fulfilling our earthly moral destiny is the basis of attaining our eternal destiny. Morality, then, becomes the condition for human beings achieving their destiny, and determines the final purpose of their existence.⁸ However, such a moral destiny is likely to be subject to individualistic arbitrariness, and at the same time is unlikely to be spatial–temporal transcendent. By contrast, the destiny conceived by Pannenberg is a *common* destiny that is to be related to its future. After all, salvation, which means nothing else than the fulfilment of human destiny, is the wholeness of human life for which human beings long but never finally achieve in the course of their earthly existence. None of them on their own initiative can make life *whole* or complete. By implication, if death were the ultimate end of human existence, if there were no life beyond death, the destiny towards which human beings are aimed might well be simply a moral destiny. However, anyone who discerns correctly what such a wholeness of life means would realise that in the life of the individual, he finds no ultimate fulfilment this side of death. The question about the fulfilment of human destiny remains open beyond the death of the individual. To be more precise, human destiny cannot be collapsed exhaustively into the world process. What human beings do on the plane of history cannot be conclusive for their destiny, *which is neither moral in the first instance nor historical in the end.*

A Destiny Oriented to the Future

As already introduced in Chapter 1, Pannenberg’s philosophical commitments orient his reflections towards the significance of the future for present experience. The overarching context that makes present experience intelligible is the implicit anticipation of a complete history, as God leads history to a new future. All reality is therefore referred to the future, which is not just any future, but is God’s future, the eschatological future. In the opinion of Pannenberg, “everything transmitted from

5 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christologie und Theologie”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21 (1975): 172.

6 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 2:222.

7 *Ibid.*, n.159.

8 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Gottebenbildlichkeit als Bestimmung des Menschen in der neueren Theologiegeschichte*, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Heft 8 (München, 1979), pp. 16–18.

the past and all present reality lost any independent meaning, and God's future itself became determinative of the present."⁹ Here, expectation or future takes precedence, for the totality of life is defined only by the future that completes it, just as we grasp the totality of a song only as we think ahead to the ending that has not yet been reached. In the march of time, we can therefore seek and hope for the totality of life only from a future that will integrate the many moments of life into a unity. However, since the future is still ahead of us, the totality of life is presently hidden from us. Only a future completion or consummation of life – that is, beyond death – can actualise this totality, which will manifest the identity of our existence in full correspondence with the will of God as Creator by unbroken participation in the eternal life of God insofar as this is compatible with creaturely finitude. Indeed, insofar as the eschatological future of God really brings about the consummation of his creation, human creatures, in particular, are always ontologically and noetically orientated to God and fellowship with him, even though this orientation is undefined and unthematic.

Turning to the basic functions of eschatology or the idea of eschatological orientation in its importance to Pannenberg's theology, Axt-Piscalar provides us with a three-way classification, which, albeit useful as a starting point, is not as exhaustive as one would like it to be, both in terms of the details in each category and the total number of categories deduced. First, Axt-Piscalar says that it is *hermeneutical*: "the understanding of the individual is determined by the context of the whole."¹⁰ Here, we see that instead of appealing to an ethic that would ground itself on a value already present, Pannenberg advocates a return to the idea of eschatological orientation with a view to showing that such an orientation does not alienate human individuals from their proper beings, but rather renders their existence in history more intelligible than other constructions. In other words, their worldly existence is only grasped in full clarity when the eschatological orientation or the concern for life beyond death is granted a foundational place within earthly existence. A neglect of this perspective would make human life in the world obscure, according to Pannenberg.

Second, it is *epistemological*: "the idea of the infinite and the whole is always presupposed for the grasping of everything finite as finite, and in that way it is really the condition of the possibility of our knowledge of the finite."¹¹ This aspect of future orientation has already been discussed in our presentation of the concept of openness to the world, and is not to be repeated here.

Third, and most importantly (insofar as this particular function of eschatology has received inadequate attention among commentators), it is *ontological*: "what is infinite and whole is claimed as the origin and basis of the being and the essence of things."¹² Hence, God is the Creator of our lives and the author and goal of our destiny.

9 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The God of Hope", in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3 vols, trans. George H. Kehm and R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970–73), 2:237.

10 Christine Axt-Piscalar, "Die Eschatologie in ihrer Funktion und Bedeutung für das Ganze der *Systematischen Theologie* Wolfhart Pannenberg's", *Kerygma und Dogma*, 45 (1999): 130.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

For Pannenberg, we are properly ourselves only as that for which God has destined and called us, and the task of forming identity is that of integrating our lives into a whole from the standpoint of our individual calling. As argued by Pannenberg, “the product, too, of our life history, the harmony of all its individual elements in God’s eternal presence, is to be seen from the standpoint of the divine ordaining and calling of individual life and hence from a standpoint from which our life points beyond the fragmentary realising of this destiny of ours.”¹³ This is because in the course of our life, we can attain it only fragmentarily, and our true selfhood always involves something more than what we can achieve in our life history. Our participation in the eternity of our life is possible only after the succession of events making up that life has ended, indeed beyond history when history itself is rounded into a whole. The eschatological transformation of our life in the light of the divine destiny does not threaten our identity, but rather completes it beyond anything that we presently are by fulfilling what is not yet fulfilled in the fragmentary form of our present life. For Jesus is a pledge that it is our relation to him, and not our sins, that determines what we ultimately are before God.

The lordship of Jesus over the cosmos is expressed in the factuality of the creation of all things, not merely towards him, but also through him. The predestination of all things towards Jesus, their eschatological summation through Jesus, is identical with their creation through Jesus. For Pannenberg, the essence of all things is to be defined ultimately in the light of him, for their essence is decided on the basis of their orientation to him. Every creature receives through him as the eschatological judge its ultimate illumination, its ultimate place and its ultimate definition in the context of the whole creation. Indeed, insofar as the Son’s moving out of the unity of the divine life makes independent creaturely existence possible, Pannenberg claims that “the Son ‘sustains’ the universe (Heb. 1:3) in its creaturely autonomy distinct from God and forms the goal of the divine world government inasmuch as this directs the course of the times to their fulfillment in such a way as ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph. 1:10), i.e., in such a way that all created things participate in the filial relation of Jesus Christ to the Father, in the fellowship with the Father that is mediated by self-distinction from him.”¹⁴

In other words, creation of all things is mediated through Jesus Christ. His mediation of creation is not to be thought of primarily in terms of the temporal beginning of the world. Rather, it is to be understood in terms of the whole of the world process that receives its unity and meaning in the light of its end that has appeared proleptically in the history of Jesus, so that the essence of every individual event, whose meaning is relative to the whole to which it belongs, is first decided in the light of this end. It is only in the eschaton that God’s eternal act of creation will be entirely unfolded, and only then will what is created out of God’s eternity be consummated in the accomplishment of its own temporal becoming. Hence, all things are to be understood from the perspective of their eschatological fulfilment, rather than from that of the beginning of the world. If the eschaton towards which all created things have their being has already appeared in an anticipatory way in

13 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:640.

14 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:58.

Jesus, then he is also the one from whom all things come. Only from him, through him, do all things have their essential nature. However, it does not follow that everything will become homogenous in the end. Wenz rightly cautions against this potential misunderstanding: “The eschatological community of the kingdom of God, in which God is all in all, will therefore not have indifference, but will be full of eternal liveliness, in which different things will be as different ones and will enrich one another mutually, in order in this way to belong to the triune God, in whom they have their life, whose essential nature cannot be thought without personal differentiation and whose personal differentiation is not conceivable without its own essence.”¹⁵ Thus, distinction will no longer mean separation, for human beings will not be seeking to be as God, but living out their own finitude in its relation to the individuality of others, just as they accept the Father in his deity and Jesus Christ as their Head and Lord.

To the above three functions we can add three more in order to be thoroughly exhaustive. Related to the previous one, the fourth function is *reconciliatory*, for as Pannenberg says, “only in the eschatological consummation will reconciliation be complete.”¹⁶ This is despite the fact that the reconciliation that is based on Jesus’ death is itself already a foretaste of such eschatological consummation. Of course, we as sinners alienated from God do need reconciliation with him if we are to achieve eternal fellowship with him. The reconciliation is grounded in God’s taking away of our death by linking our death in each baptism to the death of Jesus for whom death is a passage to life. Thus, the reconciling effect of Jesus’ death is that it guarantees those who are linked to it that death will be eschatologically vanquished. However, Pannenberg concedes, “The very concept of reconciliation, then, still contains the tension between the future of the eschatological consummation of salvation and its breaking into the present in such a way that this foretaste carries with it access to the future of salvation.”¹⁷

Fifth, against the background of modern secular criticism of the concern for a future beyond death, Pannenberg claims, “The real significance of the otherworldliness of eschatology lies in its *critical* function.”¹⁸ Here, otherworldliness does not mean escapism; rather, it aims to question the alleged self-sufficiency of the secular world, to denounce the illusions of secular belief in the attainability of a perfect and unambiguous happiness in this world. After all, in the opinion of Pannenberg, for religion to stay out of the concerns of a secular world would amount to the abolition of religion. In proclaiming the eschatological kingdom of God to be the place of true peace and justice, eschatology denounces at the same time those who claim that ultimate peace and justice could be achieved in our secular societies. It exposes human illusions about the possibilities of self-realisation in this world and the limitations of any social and cultural systems. That is why Pannenberg argues that “eschatology is

15 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 269.

16 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:641.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 77 (1984): 124.

at the heart of a Christian realism in appraising the conditions of human existence in the present world.”¹⁹

Although, as Pannenberg writes, “No part of Christian doctrines is more opposed to the spirit of secularism than the Christian hope of a life beyond death”,²⁰ it is precisely the insufficiency of the secular world that legitimates the idea of a consummation of human destiny in another world and beyond the death of human individuals. This brings us to the sixth function of the conception of eschatological consummation, the hope of which *liberates* human persons to give thanks to God in the midst of injustice and suffering. It empowers the individuals to carry the burden of their finite existence with all its irremovable limitations and frustrations. Gratitude for this life is an essential part of the Christian belief in the creation of this world by God. The secular mentality, however, exaggerates what may be expected from this finite and mortal life. It is necessary in the individual life to accept the limitations of one’s own life situation and not to indulge in exaggerated expectations on fellow humans and friends. However, Pannenberg points out, “Without bitterness or resignation, such acceptance of the finitude of this earthly life is possible for a mature, sensible person, only if he or she can believe in a life fulfilment beyond this earthly existence.”²¹ The essence of eschatological hope, hope beyond death, is faith in God. This hope is not something additional to faith in God, and it cannot persist without such faith. Otherwise, we live a life without hope. In fact, “we really live a life without hope when we spend it in numbness in one form or another to our deep anxieties or inner emptiness, or in unrealistic earthly hopes.”²²

At the same time, eschatological hope motivates us to face the evils of the world as they are, without illusion. Pannenberg borrows from Ernst Troeltsch a slogan that summarises the situation cogently: “The next world is the power of life in this world.”²³ It provides the strength required for the acceptance of the limitations and imperfections of the present world, and empowers us to affirm this present life, despite its fragility, in the light of a future consummation whose realisation transcends all human efforts. Thus, insofar as this liberating and empowering force is at work, we can say that the eternal human destiny is already present in some way in this life, and such presence can become a source of joy and happiness. Nevertheless, the transcendent source of that joy and happiness must not be forgotten. Equally, one must not overlook the dissimilarity between the liberating function of eschatology for Pannenberg and that held by many liberation theologians, who tend to take relatively utopian viewpoints and do not stress as much on an actual end to history or consummation to history.²⁴ For Pannenberg, the idea of an end to this world or human history is grounded in the inner logic of the historicity of our sense of

19 Ibid.

20 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:271.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p. 272.

23 Ibid.

24 See Ted Peters, “Pannenberg’s Eschatological Ethics”, in Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (eds), *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), esp. pp. 256–64.

meaning: each event depends on the totality of all the events and reality, and has its specific meaning, and therefore its specific nature, only insofar as it is an anticipation of the as yet incomplete whole. In other words, each event, insofar as we link a specific content and meaning to it, always presupposes the totality, and thus the consummation, of the process, even though the contours of this totality may still be indistinct. Pannenberg then argues that “each individual experience presupposes as a condition of its definite nature an end of history that makes of the history of the universe as well as humanity a total process.”²⁵ Hence, the acknowledgement of the historical character of the world necessitates the thought of its end. Historical experience involves the idea of a universal history, and that in turn implies the notion of an end, for there is no historical process without an end.

Content of Eschatological Destiny: Kingdom of God

Another way of establishing human destiny as an eschatological destiny is by investigating the content of such destiny. In other words, what kind of future lies ahead of us? Is its content eschatological by nature? Certainly, whatever content it may be, it must take into consideration the individual life of the human person as well as his destiny for a life in fellowship with others that forms the context of human life. For, as already shown in Chapter 2, human destiny is not isolated, but common. In the course of our discussion, we will spell out what is entailed in our hope that the finite, temporally limited existence of humanity is to receive unending fellowship with the eternal God by participating in his eternal life.

The immediate problem encountered would be how the idea of the fulfilment of individual life after death can be maintained at the same time with the concept of consummation of humankind and the world at the end of history. Here, unlike in Chapter 3, the issue is not about human identity persisting beyond death. Rather, if the faithful can already be united individually with Jesus Christ at death, as Luke 23:43 and Phil. 1:23 seem to suggest, then what more are they to expect from a remote end of human history? Thus, individual and universal eschatology seem to be mutually exclusive. Pannenberg states the dilemma incisively: “*Either* we expect full and real personal salvation at death even though this minimises what takes place at the end, allowing for it nothing decisive for individual fulfilment and giving it the significance only of an addition, since everything decisive has taken place already; *or* we expect the real decision and salvation to come only at the last day, though this is to play down death as access to Christ, as decision, as purifying, and as transformation.”²⁶ In this regard, what is anthropologically at issue is also about the unity of our individual and social destiny.

Of course, fellowship with Christ as the foundation of eschatology is more than simply a promise, for it is grounded in an event of fulfilment that has already taken place. Nonetheless, it does not mean that this event is fully complete. On the contrary, it still carries a reference to a future completion, which is not to be

25 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:590–91.

26 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:547.

regarded as merely supplementing the salvation that is already guaranteed, but rather which is constitutive for the salvation that has already come in Jesus Christ and for its definitiveness, just as the future of God is constitutive for what we now are and already have been. For Pannenberg, the way to overcome the dilemma between individual and universal eschatology lies in our understanding of the relation between time and eternity. As indicated earlier, the end of history or time is to be viewed as the event of dissolving time in eternity, as a result of which the individualities of creaturely reality as well as the differences of moments of time would no longer be seen apart. Pannenberg argues that “above all the existence of all individuals is simultaneous in the eternity of God, so that under the conditions of eternity there will also be fulfilled our individual destiny to belong to the whole of human society across all the boundaries that separate the epochs of history from one to another. Only in the sphere of eternity can there be an unrestricted actualising of the unity of our destiny as individuals with that of humanity as a species.”²⁷

In any biblical review of the “last things”, we are inevitably confronted with various themes of eschatology – resurrection of the dead, final judgement, the Second Coming of Jesus and the kingdom of God. All of these particular themes are concerned with individual aspects of one and the same issue, namely our participation in the everlasting life of the eternal God by means of fellowship with him beyond our finite and alienated existence. Insofar as the goal of our eschatological hope is really fellowship with the eternal God, this should provide the basis for us to grasp the intrinsic unity of those various themes in the end, despite their apparent particularities. For instance, the overcoming of death after Easter by the new life of resurrection has become the essence of the future of salvation, in the same way as participation in the divine lordship has been in the message of Jesus. There is no material difference between the two, for the new life by resurrection from the dead is life in fellowship with God by his Spirit. Their underlying unity can be found in their same character of the eschatological future, a future that is already present in the case of believers. This latter point will be examined in greater detail later.

For Pannenberg, the idea of the kingdom of God seems to be more important than other eschatological thoughts. Wenz comments, “All the individual themes like resurrection of the dead and final judgment are subsumed under the thematic of the kingdom of God.”²⁸ He adds, “All the individual aspects [of Christian doctrine] are eschatologically determined and are ordered according to the thematic of the kingdom of God, whose coming Jesus pronounced and whose future the resurrection of the Crucified proleptically revealed.”²⁹ Pannenberg states categorically, “This resounding motif of Jesus’ message – the imminent Kingdom of God – must be recovered as a key to the whole of Christian theology.”³⁰ Although Pannenberg has shied away from making any explicit statement about the all-importance of the concept of the kingdom of God in a more recent essay, “Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie” (1995),

27 Ibid., p. 607.

28 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannberg's Systematische Theologie*, p. 256.

29 Ibid.

30 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 53.

he was prepared to reiterate his strong assertion in an earlier article, “Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning”: “The Christian hope is directed towards the coming of the kingdom of God and towards participation in the new life it brings. All other ‘last things’ in Christian tradition are related to this.”³¹ The latter view is echoed in another way in “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”: “Only in the advent of the kingdom of God, which includes a general resurrection of the dead, does individual destiny coincide with the social destiny of humankind.”³² Here, a link between the conception of the kingdom of God and that of the general resurrection is forged. The possibility of all human beings, at least in principle, participating in the perfect society in which the destiny of humankind is realised is unimaginable without a resurrection of the dead. Moreover, Pannenberg points out that “for everyone to participate in the life of the society in the way appropriate to him is inconceivable unless a balance is struck by a judgment of the world which takes place beyond and outside it. Thus the association of judgment, the resurrection of the dead and the realisation of a perfect society in the concept of the end of the world and of history ... is in accordance with the idea of the consummation of man’s destiny in the unity of its individual and social aspects.”³³ This viewpoint is taken up further in *Grundlagen der Ethik*, where Pannenberg argues that “the mediation of the individual striving for a fulfilled life with the common good of the society has been suggested by the biblical idea of the kingdom of God. For according to the expectation of the bible, firstly, the getting of the individual into the community of the kingdom of God is the epitome of individual participation in salvation, and secondly, this kingdom of God is also the fulfilment of the destiny of human society for a community in true justice and peace.”³⁴ The relative significance of the particular theme of the kingdom of God is also endorsed in Pannenberg’s *Anthropology*: “The correspondence between the image of God in human beings and the Trinitarian life of God is in fact fulfilled in the human community and specifically in the community of God’s kingdom.”³⁵

This eschatological ideal, for Pannenberg, entails the warning that no secular order of society must claim to embody the social destiny of humanity, thereby exercising absolute authority over its individual members. In many of his writings, Pannenberg reiterates the superiority of biblical eschatology to secularised versions of the hope of the consummation of society, like Marxism, as the epitome of human destiny.³⁶ In the case of Marxism, only future generations of human beings will enjoy the benefits of a classless society, while biblical eschatology unites the future

31 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning”, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3:196.

32 Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, p. 127.

33 Pannenberg, “Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning”, p. 198.

34 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik: Philosophisch–Theologische Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 66.

35 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 531.

36 See “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology”, p. 127; *Systematic Theology*, 3:549; and “Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie”, p. 280.

fulfilment of human destiny to the destiny of the individuals of *all* generations.³⁷ Such an eschatological vision of the end of history represents a final resolution of the antagonism between the individual and society or among individuals, as it is unlikely to be achieved under the current conditions of human history. Pannenberg points out aptly, “Even in the family and the workplace and free societies individuals suffer deep wounds and deformations. Only the law of God that is perfected by love finally reconciles individuals with one another and therefore also with society in the kingdom of God.”³⁸ The expectation of the kingdom of God includes the conviction that only when God alone reigns and no human individual any longer has political power over other fellow humans, will the rule of humans over other humans and the inevitable accompanying injustice come to an end, thereby fulfilling the social destiny of humankind. As the just order, the kingdom marks the reconciliation of human individuals among themselves. Such a final elimination of all alienation would mean the realisation of our human destiny, that of the individual as well as that of society, thus fully incorporating humanity into the kingdom of God. In other words, the reconciliation of individuals and society in the concept of a fulfilment of human destiny is the basis of the theme of the kingdom of God. It is interesting to note that whereas previously in Chapter 2, the flow of our argument on human destiny extends from an individual to a collective basis, here the force comes in an opposite direction in that human fulfilment can only be realised corporately, including the participation of preceding generations; that is, human society and the race as a species cannot attain fulfilment without the participation of all the members.

As such, every eschatology that approaches the issue only in this-worldly terms inevitably falls short of the concept of a fulfilment of human destiny. While the concept of the kingdom of God is complex in the sense that it contains metaphorical features, we must not understand it as totally metaphorical, for power and lordship over the world are real manifestations of the will of God itself. Equally, far from being simply a formalistic idea, the kingdom of God is the utterly concrete reality of justice and love. For Pannenberg, it is “that perfect society of men which is to be realised in history by God himself.”³⁹ At the same time, Axt-Piscalar rightly emphasises that “by creating the world God makes his divinity dependent on the realisation of his rule in and over the world.”⁴⁰ However, it does not mean that for Pannenberg the world process adds to the divine reality. Instead, the effect of the process lies in the demonstration of the lordship of God over creation, without which God would not be God and cannot be *all in all*.

Our departure point, then, is the kingdom of God understood as the eschatological future brought about by God himself. Only in the light of this future can we understand

37 Of course, the participation by all may mean different things for different people, depending on how they live their earthly lives. Pannenberg writes, “At one extreme, participation in the eschatological consummation of humanity in the kingdom of God may mean for some the fulfilling of the yearning and faith that have inspired them during their earthly lives. At the other, it may mean for others eternal pain by reason of the contradiction between the way they have lived their earthly lives and their destiny”, *Systematic Theology*, 3:585.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 76.

40 Axt-Piscalar, “Die Eschatologie in ihrer Funktion und Bedeutung”, p. 134.

humanity and its history. According to Pannenberg, there is ample biblical evidence for seeing the kingdom of God as coming or future. In the Old Testament, Isaiah 2:1–5 views the kingdom as that of peace and righteousness, which “in days to come” will bring to reality the righteous will of God expressed in the God-given law of Israel. Meanwhile, Pannenberg writes, “The book of Daniel associates the fulfilment of this hope of political salvation with the expectation of direct rule by God himself, by contrast to the kingdoms of the world, based upon human rule.”⁴¹ In other words, not until the kingdom of God comes will there be an adequate basis for a truly human society. In the New Testament, Pannenberg says, “Unquestionably Jesus referred to the rule of God as coming or future.”⁴² The future sense is evidenced principally by the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:10) as well as by the common reference to achieving or entering the kingdom as participation in the future fellowship of salvation (Matt. 5:20, 7:21; Mark 9:33 par.; 10:23f. par.). In addition, the reference to future table fellowship in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11; Mark 14:25; Luke 13:29f.) at festival meals plays implicitly a determinative role in representing the future fellowship of the kingdom and in offering advance assurance of participation in its salvation. Hence, in agreement with J. Weiss, Pannenberg believes that the future sayings predominate in the bible, both in number and in substance.

Pannenberg, nevertheless, faces the task of reconciling the future sayings with the less frequent references that seem to suggest God’s rule as present. In the Scripture, the only statements that mention explicitly the kingdom of God as present are Luke 11:20 and 17:20. However, Pannenberg is adamant that the kingdom is imminent rather than present. For “the ministry of Jesus in all its aspects was oriented to the call that we should commit ourselves totally to the rule of God that he declared to be imminent.”⁴³ Otherwise, it would not make sense to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10). The Lord’s Prayer points to the future when God’s will shall be done on earth as it is now in heaven. For Pannenberg, it would therefore be a mistake to turn a single, obscure saying into the basis of an argument that diminishes the plain statements about the future of the divine rule. He asserts strongly, “We must not see statements about the presence of the kingdom as alternatives to the idea of its future coming. The reference is to the inbreaking of the future of God, but we must understand this future itself as the dynamic basis of its becoming present.”⁴⁴

So, what does it mean to understand this future as the dynamic basis of its becoming present? To begin with, it has to be stressed that for Pannenberg, the kingdom of God is not yet the way among human individuals; it is not the present reality. Our present world plagued by injustice, brutalities and wars demonstrates vividly the gulf between the present state and the kingdom of God. The utter realism of the Scripture points clearly to its proclamation of the kingdom as the *coming* reality. No matter how well things are going, no matter how intimately our fellowship with God is experienced and felt, the kingdom is future and coming. In view of this futurity of the kingdom, it is obvious that no present form of life and society is ultimate.

41 Pannenberg, “Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning”, 3:196–7.

42 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:328.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

44 *Ibid.*

The kingdom reveals itself again and again as the still unrealised future that confronts every present. This futurity of the kingdom opens ever new possibilities for action while still denying any human institution the glory of perfection that might warrant its making an absolute claim on human individuals. Hefner correctly interprets that “this future carries with it the meaning and the fulfilment which constitute the content of the Kingdom of God.”⁴⁵ More importantly, he adds, “This power of the future is ontological in scope and character, so that Pannenberg escapes the restrictiveness that might ensue if he located the Kingdom of God in the ethical functions of man or in some other functions, such as feeling. As an ontological reality, the power of the future and the kingdom it portends encompass the whole man and all of his activities.”⁴⁶

In *The God of Hope*, Pannenberg states that only the power of the future alone can be the object of hope and trust: “For the future is powerful in the present. It is the power of contradiction to the present, and releases forces to overcome it.”⁴⁷ In other words, not only is the kingdom of God not already present in reality, it is also not simply in the future, leaving us nothing to do except wait quietly for its arrival. Instead, present and future are interwoven inextricably through the power of the kingdom of God; the *present impact* of the imminent future is underscored by Jesus’ message. Jesus has indeed spoken of the presence of the kingdom, but always in terms of the presence of God’s coming kingdom. Futurity is fundamental for Jesus’ message.⁴⁸ Futurity does not mean powerless transcendency, but an urgent and imminent future. After all, as Pannenberg says, “God in his very being is the future of the world. All experience of the future is, at least indirectly, related to God himself ... Our existential awareness of the future provides evidence that our life is related to an abundant future which transcends all finite happenings. This power of the future manifests itself as a single power confronting all creatures alike.”⁴⁹ Here, the idea of power makes sense only in relation to a future. Only he who has a future is in possession of power. The future determines the specific meaning, the essence, of everything by revealing what it really was and is. The future interprets the past and the present; all other interpretations are helpful only to the extent that they anticipate the future. In other words, the truth of things that will be revealed in the future, their true essence that will come to light at the eschaton, generally defines already their present existence, even though in one way or another this may still have a radical change ahead of it. Only in the future of the kingdom, will the statement that God exists prove to be ultimately true. But then it will be clear that the statement has always been true. In other words, what turns out to be true in the future will then be evident as having been true all along; although from the viewpoint of our finite

45 Philip Hefner, “The Concreteness of God’s Kingdom: A Problem for the Christian Life”, *Journal of Religion*, 51 (1971): 194.

46 Ibid.

47 Pannenberg, “The God of Hope”, p. 243.

48 The conception of the futurity of God and his kingdom must not be understood as *removing* God to the future. It does not mean that God is only in the future and was not in the past or is not in the present. On the contrary, as the power of the future, God reigns even in the remotest past.

49 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 61.

present, the future is not yet decided. In this impending power, the coming God was already the future of the remotest past. He was the future of even that nothingness which preceded creation. In short, he was present in every past moment as the one who he is in his futurity.

Thus, the present is not independent of the future. “The future of the rule of God and its imminence”, Pannenberg writes, “... already places demands on the conduct of human persons.”⁵⁰ In other words, the relation to the future of God and his lordship decides the final salvation or damnation of human life. Those who try to secure their life in this world without regard to the future of God will lose it, while those who risk their life for the future of God’s rule and lose it for the sake of his rule on earth will finally gain it. As a result, the future has an imperative claim upon the present, pointing the whole humanity to the urgency and exclusiveness of seeking first the kingdom of God. As this message of Jesus is proclaimed and accepted, God’s rule is present so that we can even now glimpse his future glory. To be more precise, to those who open themselves to Jesus’ summon, God already comes with his rule. Or, as Pannenberg argues, “to those who now live in the light of God’s rule because they open themselves to its proximity, eschatological salvation is also present with this rule.”⁵¹ We can see, therefore, that the particular dynamic of Jesus’ message is such that the rule of God is imminent, but that it also emerges from its futurity as present. His rule is the outworking of his claim to the present life of the creature. In this way the present is to be seen as an effect of the future, and the future is already in the hidden form the present. Of course, this future and the present are not two totally different kinds of reality, for the present reality is a form of manifestation and a process of becoming for the essential form that will be revealed at the eschaton, which itself is the mode of God’s being in the coming of his kingdom. In this regard, the relation between time and eternity mediates again the relation of the essence of things to their present appearance, for their essence is the totality of their manifestation in the form of simultaneity rid of all the perversions and wounds of their earthly existence.

Thus far we have examined in abstraction the theme of the kingdom of God, which is essentially future and yet at the same time significant to the present. Accepting that, one may wonder if it can also be expressed in more concrete terms so that we can grasp more fully its content and its attributes. First of all, as the perfect society, the kingdom of God as “the replacement of every human order of rule through the uniting of all nations and humans by faith in the one God”⁵² necessarily stands in contrast to every worldly state of affairs, which is always stamped by compromise. The hope for the kingdom of God can indeed be the point of orientation for human

50 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Progress and End of History, Life after Death, and the Resurrection of the Human Person in Christianity”, in Peter Koslowski (ed.), *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life after Death of the Human Person in the World Religions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), p. 83.

51 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:331. For Pannenberg, to participate in the rule of God, to enter the kingdom of God, is the quintessence of eschatological salvation. The openness of believers to the coming of God’s rule takes place along the lines of Deut. 6:4f.

52 Pannenberg, “Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie”, p. 275.

action in this world, though its realisation is on the other side of history or at the end of history that is marked by human action and its antagonism. Pannenberg claims, "The coming of God to his sovereignty over the world is his gift to the world, unifying its scattered events."⁵³ The idea of the kingdom evokes a vision of the unity of each being and the unity of the whole world as flowing from the future. Far from creation being at one end of the temporal spectrum and eschatology at the other, both are constituent parts of the same reality. The rule of God provides unity among those who are subject to its power, and at the same time requires unity among them. For God himself is One, and reconciliation is a constitutive aspect of creation. Peters points out succinctly, "When we as parts contribute to the harmony of the whole, we participate anticipatorily in the unity which all things will ultimately find in the eschatological kingdom of God."⁵⁴

Pannenberg elaborates, "The only unity among men that does not bear the seeds of its own destruction is the unity that is brought about by justice and by caring for one another."⁵⁵ As discussed earlier, the kingdom of God is about the fulfilment of human destiny for a life in perfect communion not only with God, but also among themselves. Pannenberg explains elsewhere in "Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie", "Such a communion is conditioned by peace and justice, because the disruption of peace destroys all communion, and peace for its part presupposes a condition of mutual acknowledgment in that everyone contributes to the life of the community and receives according to his particular status."⁵⁶ A kingdom of true justice would bring the fulfilment of human common destiny within the emerging unity of humankind. It would also satisfy the needs of each human individual. Unfortunately, the realisation of justice in human societies remains always incomplete, and as a result peace remains fragile. True justice cannot be produced by law in its abstract generality. Every order of law requires a form of government to be enforced, but even an administration that has the best will cannot always avoid one-sidedness and harshness in individual cases. So long as the common cause of the society is to be administered by individual persons over against other individuals, justice and peace will not be attained definitively. That is why the prophets Micah and Isaiah have presented to their contemporaries a vision of a future in which all nations will assemble at Mount Zion in order to have their disputes about rights settled by the God of Israel so that they will have lasting justice and therefore lasting peace as a result. Peace and justice can come only from the rule of God replacing all forms of government by humans over other humans. Hence, only the kingdom of God himself will be able to establish genuine justice and consequently permanent peace.

All human efforts in justice and peace remain provisional. They are important, but at least Christians should not succumb to the illusion as if one could realise an ultimate order of peace among human beings and nations without regard to God or religion. Presumably, that is the reason why Jesus did not join those who called for revolution of the social order or for liberation from the Roman occupation in order

53 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 59–60.

54 Peters, "Pannenberg's Eschatological Ethics", p. 244.

55 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 79.

56 Pannenberg, "Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie", p. 275.

to bring about the kingdom that he came to proclaim. This also lends support to one of Pannenberg's apologetic claims: "Religion, far from having lost its function and illuminative power for human life, is confirmed again in pointing to the only radical solution for the problems of social life and political order."⁵⁷ Indeed, biblical hope suggests that only on the basis of faith in the one God, will the ultimate realisation of justice and peace in humanity be possible. Everything else remains an approximation, a human emergency. No wonder Pannenberg argues, "The necessity of the church is based on the inability of every human-political order to realise definitively peace and justice ... The fact that the church continues to exist as an independent institution beside the state is not only due to the subjective religious needs of some citizens, but it also brings into expression the provisionality and incompleteness of the realisation of the common destiny of humanity in the political order of the state."⁵⁸

As already stated, law cannot achieve the justice that we seek, for it is abstract and general. Although law serves justice, it does not constitute justice. Love, on the contrary, is not an abstract principle. It is no sentimental sensation, but the dynamic by which a human person is related to other fellow human beings and to the world in general. "Love", Pannenberg argues, "is a dynamic reality producing, in an ongoing process, new forms of human unity."⁵⁹ It is the formative ground upon which human existence is based. Moreover, love effects that unity in humanity, which expresses itself in legal forms, but which always transcends those forms. Love fills the legal forms with life, thereby attaining true justice. Justice and love are relevant not only to human individuals, but primarily to the structures of human interaction. Indeed, love is the structure of the divine conversion to the world. For Pannenberg, Jesus suggests that the creative power of the future is conceivable only if we understand its actuality in terms of love. Love interprets and underscores the emphatically personal character of human existence. It is possible for Jesus to interpret life comprehensively and exclusively in terms of eschatology only because Jesus has discovered God's love in the imminence of the kingdom, prior to its coming in its fullness. In other words, the kingdom is announced beforehand so that human beings receive the opportunity to open themselves to God's future. This way human communion with God is now made possible, and God's love is thereby exhibited. Jesus has identified love as the ultimate form of the kingdom, and by exemplifying God's love in his own life and death, Jesus has proved to be the expected *christos*, the Messiah of God, who will establish God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus apparently grounds the demand for love of neighbour, and indeed love of enemies, not in the authority of tradition, but in the goodness of the Father Creator (Matt. 5:45f.; Luke 5:35f.) and in the love of God that is manifested in the coming of the kingdom, a love in which we can share only as we are ready to respond to it. Thus, in his eschatological message with its revelation of God's love in the inbreaking of his lordship, Jesus has given the traditional law of God a new basis. This explains

57 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 32.

58 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Reich Gottes, Kirche und Gesellschaft in der Sicht systematischer Theologie", in *Beiträge zur Ethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 28–9.

59 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 81.

the reason behind Jesus' saying to the scribe in Mark 12:34: "You are not far from the kingdom of God." For, according to Jesus, the authority of the tradition no longer functions as the decisive criterion. We can see, therefore, that for Pannenberg all the statements of Christology have truth to the extent that they express how the future of the kingdom of God has become determinative for the present of Jesus' life and, through him, for the history of humankind. The kingdom has indeed become present in Jesus, in his radical devotion to it. In Jesus, the kingdom is present to all humans. Insofar as the coming rule of God is already present to the salvation of those who accept Jesus' message, Pannenberg argues that Jesus is not only in agreement with God, but he is also "the mediator of the inbreaking of the rule and the forgiving love of God."⁶⁰ As a result of God's love having become manifested through Jesus' ministry, his followers are called upon to share in the dynamics of the saving and forgiving love of God for his creatures.

Of course, at the most basic levels, one could argue that the creation of each individual creature in and of itself is already an expression of the divine love. Pannenberg rightly queries, "Why should there be anything at all rather than nothing?"⁶¹ Or, to put it more elegantly, why does God, albeit himself eternal, bring forth time, work in time and even present in time? As already discussed, the answer is love, which is the ultimate motive of God's creative activity. The appearance of the eschatological future of the eternal God in the time of his creatures has to be seen as the way in which the divine love manifests itself. Through God's reconciling action in the form of the future of God and his kingdom breaking already into the time of his creatures and being present to them in their finite time, God grants his creatures both life existence and fellowship with himself. As a result of God's love climaxing in the event of the incarnation, God can be present with us in his Son to allow us to participate in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father so that we may have fellowship with the eternal God regardless of our creatureliness. The redeeming love of the Son aims to draw alienated creatures back to the eternal love that is the source of our existence. For believers, it amounts to a guarantee of the future of salvation and an assurance of God's love with the result that they now live in a state of peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Nevertheless, this viewpoint is still subject to Pannenberg's theology of truth: "Only the eschatological consummation in which God will wipe away all tears (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:4) can remove all doubts concerning the revelation of the love of God in creation and salvation history even though the love of God has been at work already at each stage in the history of creation."⁶² What is more, only in the light of the eschatological consummation, can God's creation be ultimately justified to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), despite all the suffering and pain of the world. For Pannenberg, God's verdict "very good" certainly does not refer to any specific time, but rather to the entire course of history in which God is present with his creatures before finally leading them to participation in his glory.

60 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:334.

61 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 65.

62 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:645.

Actualisation of Human Destiny: Arrival of the Kingdom of God

It should be apparent from the foregoing discussion that Pannenberg's thought is based on an eschatological, as opposed to an ethical, understanding of the kingdom of God. In particular, he argues that "the idea of the kingdom of God today can no longer be interpreted in the sense of Kant as an expression of an ethos that is purely rationally justifiable and universally human."⁶³ For the ethos has proven itself to be very dependent on historical conditions, especially on religious bases. Moreover, the New Testament exegesis has shown that the kingdom of God in the proclamation of Jesus is not primarily an ethical idea, but rather an eschatological concept, in the same way that our earlier discussion in Chapter 2 has claimed human destiny to be fulfilled only eschatologically. Such an eschatological concept "has as its content the inbreaking of an end and a consummating transformation of this world and history by God without human assistance, from which ethical consequences for human behaviour, nonetheless, follow."⁶⁴ More recently, Pannenberg has elaborated his stance on the matter in greater detail: "A foundation of ethics out of faith in the coming God's rule is not possible in the way that it would be a matter of human action to establish the kingdom of God in this world or at least to bring a process of revolutionary change going in the society, which aims at the kingdom of God ... According to the message of Jesus, the kingdom of God comes from God alone, not by way of world-changing human action. That, however, does not exclude the fact that trust in the proximity of God's rule has consequences for human behaviour."⁶⁵

This is a summary of Pannenberg's view on the subject matter, and stands in marked contrast to the viewpoint prevailing from Kant to Ritschl when the interpretation of the kingdom in terms of moral philosophy made the concept one that sets the goal for moral action. Although Pannenberg dismisses the latter standpoint as simplistic or even dangerously naïve, he concurs that where human beings comply with the will of God, there is the kingdom of God – here is an example of how the futurity of the kingdom relates to the present. It was left for Johannes Weiss in 1892 to discover that in the proclamation of Jesus, the kingdom of God will be established not by humans but by God and God alone. Pannenberg explains, "The coming of the Kingdom will involve cosmic revolutions and change far beyond anything conceivable as a consequence of man's progressive labour. God will establish his Kingdom unilaterally."⁶⁶ This means that for Pannenberg, Jesus only *announced* the kingdom of God, which is not a state created by ethical human actions. In contrast, Pannenberg points out that even though the kingdom of God has not been conceived by Schleiermacher in the same way as by Kant as the product of human–ethical action, the "process, which leads from the founding to the consummation of the kingdom of God, is also for Schleiermacher a matter of ethical action."⁶⁷ Pannenberg sees that the motif of Schleiermacher's thought is neither God as a transcendent good nor the

63 Pannenberg, "Reich Gottes, Kirche und Gesellschaft", p. 26.

64 Ibid.

65 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 74.

66 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 52.

67 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 67.

kingdom of God imminent to the world. Rather, the motif is “man’s acquisition of the world”, and the good is simply “a projection of his own self-realisation”.⁶⁸ In our present provisional state of reality, it is part of the very condition of true humanity to understand that no form of human life is exclusively and ultimately the realisation of humanity, as evidenced by the existence of many actions and institutions that are clearly inhuman. The acceptance that the human being is not God is an essential condition of true humanity. Hence, the kingdom is most emphatically the kingdom of God rather than anything else. Any effort in lifting human beings higher than what they should be in their historically provisional moments inevitably makes them less. Humans are not exalted, but degraded when they fall victim to illusions about their power. This leads Pannenberg to assert: “What defines the relation between the church, the kingdom of God and society is no longer based on a primarily *social ethical* understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God”.⁶⁹

Indeed, historical experience repeatedly taught Israel to put the definitive coming of the kingdom to earth in the future as an eschatological hope. Jesus’ message, however, has expounded this eschatological future of God’s rule as a claim upon human conduct in present-day life, so that the future has already come for those who commit themselves to it in faith. The inclusion of tax collectors and sinners in the table of fellowship has shown the nature of the participation in salvation, which is initiated by God himself, and it means in each case the rescuing of the lost. In addition, the sending of the Son into the world and the subsequent fulfilment of his mission by his death on the cross is God’s way of actualising his rule in the world. In fact, the actualising of God’s rule in the world by the incarnation of the Son and the reconciliation of the world through him are two sides of the same thing. Without the former, the latter could not be true, and vice versa. The kingdom of God is set up in his creation with the reconciliation of the world. For Pannenberg, everything in the conduct of the Son and the work of the Spirit serves ultimately to glorify the Father and to bring about the irruption of his kingdom into the world. By this stage, one may wonder, given that the kingdom of God is established by God alone, why do we still have to hope for its arrival instead of its having been realised already? In particular, the assumption that God’s lordship over the world created by himself is not already definitive and irrefutable seems to challenge the deity of God as well as the belief in creation. However, for Pannenberg, God values greatly creaturely independence, which needs time as the form of existence in order that human creatures may bring their own lives into conformity with the future of the destiny that God has assigned them, even though this may lead to a disharmony between the self-determination of creatures and the destiny that their God Creator has given them.

Hope for the coming kingdom assumes that its ultimate actualisation is beyond human powers to effect. Yet, far from being destined to inactivity, we are inspired to prepare this presence for the future. To be sure, fellowship with God cannot be received by the inactive, the indifferent and the apathetic. Fellowship with God entails lively participation in his creative love, which supports all creatures, grants them their limited duration, and brings them to fulfilment of life by relating them to

68 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 113–14.

69 Pannenberg, “Reich Gottes, Kirche und Gesellschaft”, p. 29.

one another. In this context of defining the relation between the future kingdom of God and the present human life, Hefner criticises Pannenberg for not giving concrete direction to human lives. In other words, there is allegedly a lack of concrete content, for there seems to be “little effort made to relate God’s will to man’s own will.”⁷⁰ Pannenberg seems “to render the total historical realm in which men live and act *so* filled with God’s futurist and transcendent power that the human will plays no *actual* role of significance.”⁷¹ More crucially, as a way to overcome Pannenberg’s shortcomings, Hefner draws extensively on Heidegger’s work, which recognises that it is future possibilities that drive human beings on and shape their actions. In particular, “it helps us to understand why it is necessary to speak emphatically concerning the future and its possibilities ... while at the same time it reveals how pointless and unreal it is to speak of the future in any abstract or undifferentiated sense apart from the concreteness of the actual possibilities of living persons and communities who have been formed through their own distinctive past histories and whose possibilities are what they are within definite structures of the present situation.”⁷² In other words, Hefner believes that Pannenberg fails to appreciate adequately how the past serves as a launching-pad for human projection towards the future. For the present is not simply a point in time, but the *place* where a human person acts, on the basis of his past, towards the future possibilities upon which he has decided to project himself.

We, however, find Hefner’s interpretation of Pannenberg’s theology unnecessarily restrictive, though Pannenberg himself admits, “The concrete consequences, the specific courses of action, produced by ethics founded on the coming Kingdom of God cannot be delineated exhaustively or conclusively ... [since] even those programs most attuned to the coming Kingdom are themselves preliminary. They must be reshaped and replaced as the situation changes.”⁷³ As already discussed in Chapter 2, the will and indeed the image of God has been given in outline form to humanity by creation, thus providing to human life a direction and ensuring a certain degree of predisposition to a human destiny that is willed by God. However, the divine image is not full and absolute in our earthly existence, and can only be realised definitively at the eschaton. As a result, there is genuine scope for creaturely independence, and human beings can justifiably be held accountable for their own actions. Thus, Pannenberg never claims that humans live in a state that is so overwhelmed by God’s transcendent power that human will or act is non-consequential. In Chapter 3, our analysis of human openness to the world and human endless striving clearly recognises that for Pannenberg, it is future possibilities that drive human beings on and shape their actions. Moreover, he does not regard the past and present as having no role to play in relation to the future. On the contrary, Pannenberg writes as early as in *Theology and the Kingdom of God*: “He who despises the preliminary because he waits for the ultimate will not be able to recognise the ultimate in its coming ... The mediocre realities of our present, although they have no ultimate

70 Hefner, “The Concreteness of God’s Kingdom”, p. 195.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

73 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 116–17.

claim on us, are to be nurtured for the intuitions of the ultimate which they possess. To be converted to the world means to be converted to the present in the hope of fulfilment.”⁷⁴ In an essay first published in 1972, Pannenberg also warns against “a one-sided emphasis upon the future at the expense of the present and the past.”⁷⁵ The definite content of the future is always mediated by present and past experience. In particular, he argues, “The significance of the past for every new present which is integrated into the processes of tradition and assimilation depends upon how far this past history contains a still unspent future, that is, upon how far it is able to illuminate the experience of the present which follows it, with regard to the future.”⁷⁶ Later in yet another article, he reiterates his stance: “Going beyond, of course, must not mean destruction of the present, but rather the advent of its own future destiny.”⁷⁷ Overall, we can see, therefore, that for Pannenberg, human beings do not simply leap into the abstract future, unrelated to present and past experience, contrary to what Hefner seems to suggest.

Closely tied to our earlier discussion that human destiny will be definitively realised only eschatologically, the actualisation of the kingdom of God will come only upon the completion of history, which is unique and irreversible. This Christian understanding of the kingdom of God is incompatible with ancient ideas of periodic repetition of the course of world history or an innumerable series of re-embodiments in new forms of physical life. In this regard, Pannenberg claims support from Augustine, who “presents most forcefully the arguments which forbid the Christian to follow the idea of reincarnation, so popular in antiquity: Christ died for our sins only one time. But after he arose from the dead, he dies no more.”⁷⁸ Similarly, therefore, the ultimate goal of human existence is to be attained once and for all. Pannenberg refers also to the Book of Daniel’s visions of the sequence of empires according to God’s plan so as to point out that the goal and completion of history are related to the establishment of the kingdom of God itself at the end of the series of world empires (Dan. 2:44–5, 7:13–14). For Pannenberg, only God can bring about the completion of history, by the coming of his kingdom. For God’s action is constitutive for the concept of history.

In fact, eschaton means end, the end of history. Pannenberg aptly infers, “As the end of history it is also its completion or fulfilment insofar as history is a history of the acts of God but also in relation to our destiny as a theme of history.”⁷⁹ In other words, the two aspects, end and completion, are not alternatives; rather, they “go together in the sense that we cannot think of an end that is not a completion or a completion that is not an end.”⁸⁰ A completion without an end would mean that

74 Ibid., p. 126.

75 Pannenberg, “Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning”, p. 210.

76 Ibid.

77 Pannenberg, “A Response to My American Friends”, in Braaten and Clayton (eds), *Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 331.

78 Pannenberg, “The Progress and End of History”, p. 88.

79 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:586.

80 Ibid. This is somewhat at odds with the reading offered by Wenz: “Zwar könne es ein Ende ohne Vollendung, nicht aber eine Vollendung ohne Ende geben”, *Wolfhart Pannenburgs Systematische Theologie*, p. 262.

the ensuing time loses inevitably all its content and significance. Conversely, an end without a completion would indicate that there is no fulfilment or final goal of human existence. In addition, the problem of linking the idea of an end of time or history with that of eternal life would disappear when we consider that God rather than nothingness is the end of time. Thus, it is not the annihilation of time, but God who lifts temporal history into the divine eternal presence. Pannenberg puts it convincingly: “Already our existence as historical beings has a purpose and goal only if the fulfilment of our history is itself a historical event and as such the end of history. If the thought of a completion simply hovers over history without entering into it as the event that ends it, this means that there is no fulfilment for the historical existence of individuals and the race.”⁸¹

Human destiny is, therefore, to be fulfilled in the completion of humanity and of all history in the future of God: “Not the present order of the cosmos, but only the future of God and of his kingdom is supposed to bring the consummation of humanity.”⁸² As God is the Creator of the world, where he reigns his creatures attain the goal of the destiny that is constitutive of their nature. This is true of individuals, whose restless demands first find peace in fellowship with God, as much as of human society in which the common destiny of individuals takes shape. That is why Pannenberg believes that “the individual is and remains by love a member of the human community, which will find its completion in the Kingdom of God. The affinity of these two aspects, the individual and the communal, is expressed in Christian eschatology ... as one event concerning all human persons in common at the end of the history of this world, as the universal resurrection of the dead at the completion of the Kingdom of God with the Second Coming of the Messiah.”⁸³ If it is, indeed, intended to formulate the conditions for the realisation of human destiny in the unity of its individual and social aspects, then in the future of the kingdom of God we are concerned with the true and essential future of humanity. Overbeck rightly points out, “In Christianity, this idea [of the possible totality of life] takes on the form of the expectation of the future kingdom of God, in which the totality of the individual human life as well as his destiny of the image of God will be fulfilled. In this historical perspective, the human person is on the way to himself, to the totality of his existence. Pannenberg calls this destiny the ‘essential future of humanity’ [*Wesenszukunft des Menschen*].”⁸⁴

Ethics and Eschatology: How Far Apart?

Thus far, we have presented that human destiny is not principally a moral destiny. Instead, it will be realised definitively only in the eschatological future, in the future actualisation of the kingdom of God. For Pannenberg, nonetheless, it does not mean that all ethical concerns recede to the point of disappearing in the light

81 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, p. 587.

82 Pannenberg, “Christliche Anthropologie und Personalität”, in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, 2:150.

83 Pannenberg, “The Progress and End of History”, p. 88.

84 Overbeck, *Der gottbezogene Mensch*, p. 63.

of the imminent kingdom of God. On the contrary, he asserts, “The political and ethical content of the idea of the kingdom of God is not ruled out but held onto in its eschatological interpretation”.⁸⁵ However, a mere ethical interpretation that focuses on human action would no longer understand the kingdom as the exercising of God’s own lordship. If the idea of God’s rule as opposed to human rule is to be taken seriously, then the initiative of the realisation of his kingdom must be conceived as coming from God himself. This is the case in the eschatological interpretation of the concept. The question that now confronts us must be whether this brief summary is a conclusive representation of Pannenberg’s thought. Are the two themes, ethics and eschatology, as distinctly separated as what seems to have been suggested here? Is or should Pannenberg’s conception be more profound than that?

In order to address this question adequately, we have to start by examining his ethics programme in its own right as well as in relation to his overall dogmatic scheme. One important corollary arising from our study is that Pannenberg’s thought in this area seems to have matured over the years since he first published his collection of essays in the 1960s and 1970s, which were subsequently republished as *Ethics* in 1981. As a whole, the book does not attempt to address the matter of our day-to-day moral deliberations. Instead, it demonstrates the necessity of human goals that elevate individuals, and at the same time rejects both the view of a common natural ethic for all and the idea that natural ethics can serve as a bridge between human consciousness and God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. For Pannenberg, a natural ethic is impossible nowadays as a basis for establishing the truth of Christianity. Of more direct relevance to us is that Christian ethics, as described in *Ethics*, is essentially grounded in the idea of the kingdom of God. In other words, Christian ethics is principally eschatologically founded. This standpoint is reiterated in another of Pannenberg’s earlier works, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, especially in its essay “The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics”. Not surprisingly, this led him to accept the subordination of ethics to dogmatics in one of his earliest articles: “The question of the truth of what we say about God and about the revelation of his love in Jesus Christ must take precedence over the other question concerning the ethical relevance of the Christian message, and it cannot be narrowed *a priori* to that which already seems ethically significant.”⁸⁶

More recently, Pannenberg published *Grundlagen der Ethik* in 1996 and republished another batch of selected articles, most of which first appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, in *Beiträge zur Ethik* in 2004. As we shall see, over the years the complexity of his thought has increased and the methodology underpinning his work has *thickened* noticeably. Unfortunately, Pannenberg himself has not taken the initiative to articulate how and why the changes have come about, and at the same time not much help is received from secondary commentators either, who simply state what Pannenberg’s current views are. However, this way the readers would be ill-equipped to appreciate sufficiently the meaning and significance of his ideas in the manner they are formed and shaped by Pannenberg.

85 Pannenberg, “Reich Gottes, Kirche und Gesellschaft”, p. 30.

86 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Theology and the Crisis in Ethics”, in *Ethics*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 67.

Above all, we argue that the anthropological turn, which Pannenberg decisively and successfully executed in early 1980s, has provided his ethical argumentation with an extra dimension and increased depth. This has in turn triggered a series of other modifications and readjustments within his theology. Unlike previously, although Pannenberg still assigns dogmatics some kind of foundational function for ethics, he does not deny the latter its relative independence.⁸⁷ Pannenberg now says, “As opposed to the inclusion of ethics in dogmatics itself ... the independence of the ethical discipline, however, has rightly been claimed in the theological discussion.”⁸⁸ In this regard, the later Pannenberg has gone one step further: “The relative independence, which should be granted to ethics within Christian theology in relation to dogmatics, is based on the necessity of developing ethical argumentation on an anthropological basis.”⁸⁹ In fact, not only that, he explicitly argues, “It [Ethics] has its foundations in anthropology rather than directly in dogmatics, although relations to dogmatics are by no means excluded as a result.”⁹⁰ This is, without doubt, a strong theological and ethical claim. It represents a clear departure from the earlier stance assumed by Pannenberg. To put it another way, Eberhard Schockenhoff writes, “The necessity that links back ethical argumentation to the anthropological basic question of humanness leads to the granting to ethics a ‘relative independence’ in relation to dogmatics in the entire theology.”⁹¹

Thus, Pannenberg has not changed his mind on the need for foundations for ethics as such. On the contrary, he seems to have determined to devote his career to addressing fundamental theological issues, and his focus remains on foundations for ethics rather than ethics itself. For Pannenberg, no ethical statement is of itself universally valid (*allgemeingültig*).⁹² An ethic is in need of non-ethical foundations. Indeed, earlier he has argued vehemently for an ontological foundation of ethical standards: “Only on such a foundation can ethical statements be distinguished from the arbitrary or authoritarian proclamation of imperatives. Only on such a foundation do ethical statements become intelligible.”⁹³ To be ontological, the ethical foundation must go beyond the mere identification of already existent patterns of human behaviour, beyond the given situation of the present. In other words, ethics must reveal within the present human reality the tendencies towards the possible amelioration of present life, pointing to not only what is, but also what is to be, what can be, what ought to be. However, unlike Barth’s attempt to annex ethics to a Christological foundation, Pannenberg would like to hold onto

87 However, Pannenberg does not seem ready to go as far as Troeltsch and Herrman to see ethics “as the study of the ultimate goals and purposes of human existence ... the supreme and most fundamental intellectual discipline, and the study of religion must fit within its framework” (“The Basis of Ethics in the Thought of Ernst Troeltsch”, in *Ethics*, pp. 88–9).

88 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 5.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

91 Eberhard Schockenhoff, “Rezension *Grundlagen der Ethik*”, *Theologische Revue*, 92 (1996): 428.

92 Pannenberg uses the term “universally valid” as not only speaking from faith to unbelief, but also transcending generations and cultures.

93 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 105.

a broader, universally accessible, anthropological basis of ethics. He does not want “to develop [ethical opinions] from a predetermined standpoint of faith, but in the context of the universally accessible problematic of human lifestyle.”⁹⁴ This particular feature sets Pannenberg’s conception of ethics apart from his dogmatics. The anthropological basis of ethics has to come into view for itself without already being interpreted by the dogmatic presuppositions of the idea of God in a definite way. For Pannenberg explains, “The universality of this connection between religion and moral determination of humanity is easily darkened, if it is only asserted from the side of revelatory religion and its theology.”⁹⁵ *The relation of the ethical thematic to the idea of God has to be gained and clarified only in the course of the ethical argumentation.* Thus, as stated above, for Pannenberg, ethics is not grounded directly in dogmatics. Only then can the claim of universal validity for ethics be sustained. At the same time, the anthropological universality of ethics establishes the proximity of theological ethics to philosophical ethics, and is fundamental to the claim of validity of its views.

Nowadays, the proclamation of imperatives backed by divine authority in itself is unlikely to be sufficiently persuasive. Imperatives that are proclaimed without clear reasons and effective sanctions are also unlikely to be observed widely. For Pannenberg, therefore, “the question as to whether ethics requires a religious foundation can be studied with the claim of universal validity only on the basis of anthropology.”⁹⁶ In other words, assessments of any ethical foundations have to be undertaken at the level of anthropology. If we have to label Pannenberg’s ethics, it would be *first and foremost* anthropological ethics rather than eschatological ethics, a term that was used as an essay title by Ted Peters in the 1980s. To be fair, Peters’s reading of Pannenberg’s ethics is not a misinterpretation as such, but rather confirms our basic thesis that Pannenberg’s conception of ethics has undergone a fundamental shift over the years. Commenting on the anthropological basis of ethics, Pannenberg claims, “Only so can the expectation of universally human evidence, which is characteristic to Jesus’ interpretation of law because of the context of its eschatological point of departure with reference to the Creator God, become explicitly thematic as such.”⁹⁷ It is important to stress again that Pannenberg is not denying eschatology or indeed dogmatics as a whole to assume any role in laying the foundation for ethics, but any such move has to be made on the plane of anthropology.

The eschatological foundation of the idea of God’s love revealed in the sending of Jesus is within the scope for the message of Jesus itself quite apart from a theological creation foundation, which refers to the goodness of the Creator God as the model of human behaviour (Matt. 5:45). Of course, the imitation of the goodness of the Creator by human creatures is compatible with their nature and destiny. In the opinion of Pannenberg, this can reasonably be proven at the level of anthropological reflection

94 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 85.

95 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Moral and Religion”, in *Beiträge zur Ethik*, p. 89.

96 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 81. Further on, Pannenberg adds that “sie [foundations of ethics] rechnen darüber hinaus auf eine humane Evidenz ... nämlich auf der Ebene der Anthropologie” (p. 102).

97 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

as human nature. The theological creation foundation, just as the eschatological foundation of Jesus' idea of love, argues from God and his action, and it also reveals room for ethical reflection on the basis of human creatureliness. Thus, we can see that unlike the early Pannenberg, another major advancement in his ethical thought is to be found in the established connection between the eschatological horizon and created human nature. Importantly, this mirrors the same link seen from the perspective of the idea of the image of God, which we have examined in Chapter 2 and to which we shall return later in this chapter. In both cases, the link manifests itself in a positive relation between the reality of human creation and its eschatological consummation. It exists in the endless human striving, whose ultimate fulfilment will bring the future of eschatological consummation.

Before proceeding further, one may wonder, what is the significance of that human creatureliness in the context of the reality of the ethical life? In addressing this question, Pannenberg draws our attention to the three basic elements identified by Trutz Rendtorff, who in turn has been inspired in some way by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The first basic element is the "givenness of life" – "not only in the sense that some time we have received our life from our parents, but rather that we receive it daily anew, with all that which would contribute to its fulfilment."⁹⁸ However, it does not follow that the content of our received life would be self-intelligible. Instead, it would become thematic only if we constantly come into awareness of our life as that received from God. The question of the good or of what is good for us, therefore, has to be put under the presupposition of the givenness of our life. Moreover, insofar as ethical views derive their plausibility from the concept of creation, Rendtorff speaks of an orientation of the foundation of ethics to the idea of creation. Secondly, the ethical task is "to give life", to lead a life for others as opposed to a life directed to immediate self-realisation. This, of course, is consistent with the idea of Christian love according to the model of the love of God as the Creator and the Finisher of the world. The third basic element of ethics is the "reflexivity of life", which is an ability of distancing to allow human beings to become aware of their finitude. All these three elements are endorsed by Pannenberg, and can easily be justified on Christian grounds, though Rendtorff seems to prefer to establish ethics independent of the doctrine of God.

What has been presented above, that the plane of ethical argumentation has to be found first of all in anthropology, Pannenberg refers to pre-theological (*vorth theologischen*) anthropology rather than theological anthropology. This involves a reconstruction of pre-Christian as well as non-Christian anthropological views. As already suggested, Pannenberg does not agree that ethics are to be developed from a predetermined standpoint of faith, but rather in the context of the universally accessible problematic of human life. It is only from there that we can then engage the ethical inquiry along the line of the Socratic and Platonic question about the good. Pannenberg explains, "It is not enough for the ethical argumentation to formulate universal norms of action, which are identified as conditions for the continued existence of a community. Rather, it is required to link the concept that what is

98 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

good for the individual to that of the universal best.”⁹⁹ Indeed, for Pannenberg, “the concept of ethics ... cannot be thought at all without the anthropological orientation of the classical Greek philosophy.”¹⁰⁰ Here, the good is identified as that which all people lack and for which they strive. As they strive for the good, they strive for what is good for them. According to Pannenberg, the good is something that is not yet realised, but is essential to the realisation of human essence. The idea of the good, therefore, provides us with a structural description of the rationale behind human action. Thus, the Socratic–Platonic way to the foundation of ethics, or more precisely *Güterethik*, seems to be much better able to avoid the arbitrariness associated with politically binding imperatives or habitual customs.

Nevertheless, the quest for the good, seeking what is good for human beings, remains only a starting point, however attractive it may be, for Pannenberg’s ethical investigation. The Socratic–Platonic scheme has failed to determine adequately the nature of the good, thereby leaving this idea open to association with happiness. To be sure, the idea of the good is in no way only about the happiness of the individual or its compatibility with the universal rule of human reason. Aristotle’s concept of happiness offers no solution to the question. Striving for happiness does not equate with striving for the good. Pannenberg highlights that Plato did recognise this problem, admitting that pleasure only accompanies the good, but is not the good itself. Similarly, the distinction of the good from the human individual for whom it is good is evident from the fact that he strives for it. As such, he does not yet possess it. This also suggests that his life has yet to come to a definitive unity with itself.

If the good is to be distinguished from the happiness that it produces, it must be something within itself. For Plato, the good is that which is beyond every existence, even beyond being. What exists now is not itself good. We are constantly striving for a good that we presently do not have. The source of the good is future and transcendent, and yet asserts an ontological priority over everything extant. In particular, if the good is also that for which all things long, it is reasonable to conceive of the good as God, converging the source of the good and the source of being. After all, it is God who determines what is as well as what is good. Thus, God is both the object of our striving and the concrete embodiment of the good. The good that is to be attained for its own sake is no longer identified with happiness, especially with happiness attainable in this earthly life. If happiness is allowed to take priority over God as the good, the goal of human existence, that would give us the precise definition of sin, as discussed in the last chapter. Instead, striving for the good must take priority over the search for happiness. The pursuit of happiness for its own sake is egocentric and leads man astray. Only those who seek the good for its own sake will thereby find happiness. For Pannenberg, who appeals to the Christian Platonism of Augustine, God is “the highest good of the individual, but at the same time also as the origin of our common good, of the just order of our common life.”¹⁰¹ As such, the content of the good no longer varies with the changing conditions of human life, for it is not derived from an analysis of those attributes that allegedly enable human

99 Pannenberg, “Moral und Religion”, pp. 83–4.

100 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Religion und Ethik”, in *Beiträge zur Ethik*, p. 138.

101 Pannenberg, “Moral und Religion”, p. 84.

nature to flourish. Hence, since Plato, the philosophical question about the good as the question about human destiny has always been linked with the idea of God as the one good.¹⁰² God is the origin and Lord of all things. Pannenberg points out aptly, “As the highest good of humanity, he is necessarily the basis of all other forms of the good ... the origin and basis of also all ethical norms and their binding force”.¹⁰³

The above conclusion seems inevitable as long as from the outset one does not rule out God from the question. Still, it is crucial to bear in mind that the significance of the idea of God for ethics is grounded in the plane of anthropology, under the concept of the good, which is the anthropological goal of human longing for life fulfilment. Pannenberg argues, “Only the thesis that the true good for human beings is God or rather fellowship with him ..., only this thesis and its substantiation leads to a theological foundation of ethics. But, even a theological foundation of ethics will remain related to the plane of anthropological argumentation and will have to move on it.”¹⁰⁴ Hence, the reason why and the way in which Pannenberg applies the idea of God or dogmatics in general to ethics is not quite what Schockenhoff tries to suggest: “A purely anthropological foundation of ethics has lost its plausibility with the erosion of the binding nature of moral norms; today it cannot be effected other than on a dogmatic foundation in the widest sense.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the key word used to describe the move from a pure anthropological basis to a Christian anthropological one is *Modifikation* by Pannenberg, and quite rightly *Anverwandlung* as opposed to *Verwandlung* by Wenz. Pannenberg speaks of “a reflection on the specifically Christian modifications of the anthropological bases of ethical argumentation. In the necessity of such modifications ... the dogmatic presuppositions of Christian ethics concretise with reference to the anthropological basis itself, on which ethical argumentation has to move.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Wenz writes, “Pannenberg puts in order his own ethical conception in the context of Christian appropriation of the Platonic question about the good.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, when a dogmatic foundation of ethics is formed, it involves modification, appropriation or adaptation, rather than a dramatic transformation, of the anthropological basis of ethics. Otherwise, it would contradict what Pannenberg claims earlier about the primacy of *vorth theologischen* anthropology.

Drawing on the arguments of Schleiermacher, Pannenberg writes that it is not entirely appropriate to regard God as the highest good. Instead, the kingdom of God is the highest good, because the redemption through Christ in the human race is depicted only by the kingdom of God. Even better, however, is the expression of fellowship with God, insofar as a good is only something for us to possess or hold. This means that “the admission to the salvific communion of God’s rule for human beings is the highest good, which brings all human seeking and striving to the peace

102 However, for Kant, God is the highest original good (*das höchste ursprüngliche Gut*) in the sense that God as the originator of the natural world and the moral order is the condition of the attainability of the highest good to be realised through human action in the world.

103 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 73.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

105 Schockenhoff, “Rezension *Grundlagen der Ethik*”, p. 428.

106 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 104.

107 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenburgs Systematische Theologie*, p. 255, n.13.

of fulfilment: the eternal salvation.”¹⁰⁸ Pannenberg agrees that the concept of the kingdom of God as the place of human fellowship with God states more precisely the idea that God is the highest good for human beings. But, as such, the idea of the kingdom of God has universal ethical relevance, and offers a purely philosophical ethical reflection. No wonder Pannenberg claims, “The ethical relevance of the idea of the kingdom of God is not limited to a specifically Christian ethic.”¹⁰⁹

Wenz rightly comments, “If the future of the kingdom of God takes priority over all human actions in order to function in exactly this pre-order as the mediation of the difference between individual and society, then it is evident that the idea of God and his kingdom must have not only a motivational function but also a foundational function for the contents of ethical opinions. This is shown clearly in detail in Jesus’ interpretation of the law as a consequence of his eschatological message.”¹¹⁰ In other words, the question of the possibility of a foundation of ethics based on the standpoint of God’s rule, or rather the kingdom of God, can no longer overlook Christian theology, for in the message of Jesus such a foundation of ethical norms exists or at least is given implicitly. Honecker explains, “Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God leads to the view that life cannot be considered only from the perspective of one’s own ego, but makes possible through it love and benevolence.”¹¹¹ Pannenberg identifies the being of God with the kingdom or rule of God. By loving one another and our world now, we are participating in the transforming power of God’s love, therefore of God’s rule. The eschatological message of Jesus forms the foundational context of the love command, which itself is grounded in human creatureliness. In a de-eschatologised world, even the command of love will be unable to retain the meaning and significance it is supposed to have in the light of Jesus’ eschatological message. In *Jesus – God and Man*, Pannenberg cites Weiss to say that “the nearness of the Kingdom is the *motif* of the new morality.”¹¹² Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God defines the horizon for all ethical statements, because it is understood as God’s gift of himself in fellowship, the true basis of all ethical obligations, which both relativises and motivates our ethical orientation. The important end-result then is, according to Pannenberg, “The correspondence between the future of God’s rule and the future of the good in the sense of the Platonic founding of ethics allows the foundation of ethics to be presented on *the future of God’s rule not only as the standpoint of Christian faith, but also with the claim of universal validity*” (emphasis mine).¹¹³

In this regard, it can also be said that ethics is established on the basis of dogmatics within Christian theology, even though this is contrary to one of the basic convictions of modernity that the consciousness of ethical norms and their binding force has become independent of religion and its dogmatics. For Pannenberg, the

108 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 72.

109 Ibid., p. 73.

110 Wenz, *Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Systematische Theologie*, p. 255, n.13.

111 Martin Honecker, “Rezension *Grundlagen der Ethik*”, *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 122 (1997): 78.

112 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 241.

113 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, pp. 71–2.

latter becomes intelligible when it is understood together with the other aspects of the emancipation of the public culture of the modern age from its religious roots in Christianity. This emancipation is due primarily to the destructive consequences of a century of confessional wars for the social peace.¹¹⁴ However, ethics needs a grounding in religion as human basic givenness. Pannenberg writes, “Through religion the rules of moral behaviour are grounded in the depth of the basic convictions of the individual so that he is motivated to behave in accordance with them. That is so, because the moral order of our common life is established ultimately in God, who wills fellowship of human beings.”¹¹⁵ This brings us onto the controversial question as to whether there is or has to be a specific Christian ethic, or whether the contribution of Christianity to ethics is limited to a special motivation to do what is good and correct, according to universal human judgement. If the latter is true, then ethics can have its content determined by reason alone. Moreover, Christian ethics would be reduced to nothing more than an *additional* motive for doing the good.

Borrowing a sentence from Iwan Karamasow, Pannenberg puts it incisively that “without faith in God and in the immortality of the soul ‘everything is permitted’.”¹¹⁶ Pannenberg notes that the attempt to base the consciousness of moral obligation on the bare autonomy of reason has failed. In other words, the idea that ethics can exist completely independent of the doctrine of faith and can be founded on reason alone has proved to be a serious mistake. Of course, Pannenberg does not doubt that it is possible for human beings to have morally high behaviour without any religious ties. Indeed, he says, “In such cases, the moral basic convictions can even take the place of religion, and manifest themselves particularly impressively.”¹¹⁷ For Pannenberg, however, one must not rule out that their roots ultimately lie in religion, as claimed by Horkheimer: “everything that connects with morality goes back in the end to theology, and every morality is grounded in theology at least in the western world.”¹¹⁸ If this is correct, one can see why the attempt to base morality on reason alone, contrary to its intention, has in fact given rise to the decline in morality itself. In the face of the dwindling influence of religion on human behaviour, even within the church, as the binding power of Christian ethical statements seems to be exhausted, Pannenberg calls for an urgent renewal of the formation of such ethical opinions.

At the same time, Pannenberg believes that both of the themes, morality and religion, should be seen as closely connected, “for the duty of worshipping God itself has been considered as part of the natural human duty testified by conscience.”¹¹⁹ As long as it is believed that the one, true God has been known and worshipped by humanity ever since the first human beings, all obligations in relation to human

114 For other reasons suggested by Pannenberg, see “Religion und Ethik”, p. 142.

115 Pannenberg, “Moral und Religion”, p. 84.

116 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Verbindliche Normen ohne Gott?”, in *Beiträge zur Ethik*, p. 151.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

118 *Ibid.*

119 *Ibid.*, p. 147. Interestingly, Pannenberg takes a different view with regard to conscience in *Theology and the Kingdom of God*: “Neither can the appeal to conscience provide absolute norms for behaviour ... Conscience is not exempt from change, indeed it is in many respects a highly mutable phenomenon. The most horrible atrocities against humanity have often been carried out with the best of conscience” (p. 104).

beings themselves have their final basis in the common worship of their Creator. Indeed, for Pannenberg, even the basis of the fellowship of the new covenant is always in our common worship of God, in our common faith in the one Lord. A commitment to the norms of our common life can be linked to our worship of God, insofar as such norms are grounded in the will of God. There is, therefore, from time immemorial a connection between religion and morality. In the centre of the question of such a relation, Pannenberg finds the experience of the authority of the good itself. He argues, "Such experience is closely connected with the question about human destiny, and according to that, about what constitutes and determines the identity of an individual, his identity as always a human being but also as *this* particular human person. The roots of moral consciousness and of its connection with the theme of religion lie here."¹²⁰

In short, for Pannenberg, a universally binding ethics cannot be formulated today on a non-religious basis. This reverses the relation between religion and ethics from that claimed by Shaftesbury and Kant; that is, instead of an ethical basis for the truth of religion, the argument is now for a religious foundation of ethics. To be more precise, Pannenberg spells out, "In the biblical perspective, the basis of our common faith in God can in no way be considered as being, if necessary, dispensable for the binding nature of the instructions, which are related to interpersonal behaviour."¹²¹ On the contrary, the claim of universal validity in Christian ethics is the condition of its binding nature for Christians. Ethical norms, which are based purely on human values, would be complied with, perhaps, as some outward, legal norms rather than as something inwardly obligating. As a result, they would lose their specific moral character. The binding nature of ethical norms requires an authorisation, which in the history of humanity is usually derived from religion. This raises the question of the authority of the divine reality on which the obligations of ethical norms are to be established. Thus, their bases have to be authorised, not just by any god, but above all by the will of the one God who is ascribed the origin of the cosmic order.

For Pannenberg, the message of Christian faith does include the claim of universal validity in the sense that it proclaims the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, as the Creator of the world and, therefore, as the one God responsible for all humankind. The ancient Christianity established this claim through the connection between the revelation of the biblical God and the idea of the God of philosophy, just as the early Christian doctrine of logos identified as universally valid the claim of Christian proclamation that Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of the Creator God. That is why it could consider also Jesus' interpretation of law as a manifestation of the authority of the divine logos in him. More importantly, Pannenberg argues that "dogmatics also has a reference to what is universally human, as the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ forms the centre of Christian doctrine, and Jesus Christ as the new and final human being is principally decisive for the Christian understanding

120 Pannenberg, "Moral und Religion", pp. 88–9. At the same time, Pannenberg warns against the tendency to reduce religion to ethics. For, in his opinion, the view that Christianity is essentially about loving one's neighbour is still widely held today. See *Grundlagen der Ethik*, pp. 10–11.

121 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 93.

of human destiny.” Then, Pannenberg adds a further crucial claim: “Here dogmatics and ethics are necessarily connected.”¹²² Unlike previously, the later Pannenberg is clearly determined to establish a more level relationship between dogmatics and ethics, rather than a subordination of one to the other. The early Pannenberg held a different view. Apart from the quotation cited at the beginning of this section, he stated in an article first published in 1977 that “the Kingdom of God must show that it is the highest human good, and only insofar as this happens is the inclusion of ethics in dogmatics accomplished ... This must be done if the priority of the Kingdom of God is to be taken seriously in theological thought.”¹²³ In our discussion thus far, there have been many statements which clearly suggest that this is no longer the view held by Pannenberg. Another directly relevant assertion made by Pannenberg is: “Dogmatics has to do with God and his action, certainly also with its consequences in the creation of the world and humanity, with the fact of human sin and its reconciliation, finally even with the sanctification of human life: in the case of this theme of human sanctification through the inclusion of our life and death in the relation of the Son Jesus Christ to the Father, dogmatics touches particularly closely with Christian ethics.”¹²⁴

The single most important factor that has precipitated the change in Pannenberg’s thought is his employment of anthropology; related to that is his push for a relatively independent role for ethics. Of course, this does not mean that the early Pannenberg did not make use of anthropology at all. Indeed, embryonic forms of his subsequent views can be found in a 1962 article “Theology and the Crisis in Ethics”: “Comprehensive knowledge of the reality of God, of the specific reality of the created world, and of our existence is the only possible basis for understanding the extent to which the ethical consequences we draw from that knowledge are applicable.”¹²⁵ From this brief passage, we can see that the early Pannenberg had already recognised the need for relating anthropology as well as dogmatics to our understanding of ethics. However, it is the completion of his anthropological programme in the 1980s that has enabled Pannenberg to appropriate anthropology in a methodologically systematic way, with an acute awareness of all the ethical and dogmatic implications, as evident in our discussion above. In particular, as we have seen, Pannenberg has paid great attention to the level at which and the way in which anthropology and dogmatics are to be brought into his overall ethical inquiry. The end result is a much more profound and well-considered presentation of the interrelationship of the three individual components. Pannenberg comments, “If the dependence of a Christian theological ethic on dogmatic presuppositions is especially concerned with the realm of anthropology ... and if the views of dogmatic anthropology can be summarised in the two themes of human destiny and human sin as a transgression of destiny, then the anthropological basis of a Christian ethic gains its specifically Christian profile.”¹²⁶

122 Ibid., p. 5.

123 Pannenberg, “The Basis of Ethics in Ernst Troeltsch”, p. 111.

124 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 103.

125 Pannenberg, “Theology and the Crisis in Ethics”, p. 68.

126 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, pp. 104–5.

For Pannenberg, our question of human destiny, which becomes thematic in the process of the identity formation, is closely related to the question of the good. As we have shown, the concept of the good has to do with the yet-to-come fulfilment of human existence in the face of a still open future. Pannenberg says, “The good in this sense apparently corresponds to the concept of human destiny in the historically still unfinished wholeness of his existence. When we affirm something as good, we recognise it as part of our destiny.”¹²⁷ Indeed, human destiny for fellowship with God, which is the highest good for human beings, forms the first anthropological standpoint constitutive for a Christian ethic, according to Pannenberg. The second aspect is marked by the theme of sin, under which human beings are alienated from God and other fellow humans as a result of their excessive desire for fulfilment of their own ego. Pannenberg points out, “The universal spreading of the power of sin in human behaviour characterises the realism of Christian anthropology and ethics.”¹²⁸ For the apostle Paul, Christians cease to be under the control of sin only through faith and baptism, and therefore through their communion with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3–11).

Much as we find Pannenberg’s approach commendable, one should feel justified to have reservation about his almost exclusive emphasis on the idea of the kingdom of God as the source of the theological foundation of ethics. Intuitively, it would seem unrealistic to expect that any single doctrine on its own can be sufficiently all-embracing to constitute the sole theological foundation of ethics. On the theme of sanctification that, in Pannenberg, connects dogmatics with ethics, the role of the Spirit, who is the Lord and Giver of life universally, is absolutely crucial. On the one hand, the Spirit as the perfecting cause gives reality to the world by perfecting what the Father does through his Son; on the other, the Spirit in God’s eschatological work brings the creation to its perfection, its completedness, in the fullness of time. Although all human beings are still born as “the first man”, “the new man” grows in them by faith and baptism and by the working of the Spirit. In particular, according to the apostle Paul, believers are to be transformed by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ, who is God’s image (2 Cor. 3:18, 4:4). It is only when the new life in Christ brings the power of the Spirit that the sin of the flesh can be overcome and the desire of the Spirit produced (Rom. 8:1–4). In Romans 8 and Galatians 5, to walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) through baptism is to walk in the “new life of the Spirit” (Rom. 7:6). Christians are not left to their own devices in the pursuit of their destiny, but are enabled and equipped for walking in newness of life through the miraculous power of the Spirit. Or, in Pannenberg’s language, the Spirit leads us beyond our ego and finiteness to our goal, our destiny. That is why we are told to “live by the Spirit ... and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

The fact that Christian life is walking in the Spirit means not only a new motivation, but also a new orientation. When Christians actually walk in the Spirit, the Spirit is also the guiding principle (hence “according to the Spirit” in Rom. 8:4–5). Important in this regard is the fact that by the continued creative activity of the Spirit, God constantly rescues his creatures from the entanglement in self-centredness that

127 Pannenberg, “Sünde, Freiheit, Identität”, p. 243.

128 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 107.

comes as a result of their anxieties and desires. Indeed, the Spirit is capable of doing what the law in its impotence cannot do. The presence of the eschatological future in the life of the faithful and the life of the Eucharistic community is the work of the Spirit. In the New Testament, we find in the Spirit's presence with Jesus Christ and believers the decisive indication of the coming of the eschatological consummation. Indeed, the powerful presence of the Spirit in the human person of Jesus shows that he is the eschatological revealer of God through whom the coming of the kingdom of God is already dawning. The Spirit who is imparted to believers guarantees them an anticipatory participation in their final destiny through a sharing in the future consummation (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5; cf. Eph. 1:13f). In short, the Spirit is first and foremost the power, the basis and the context of human existence, without which any talk of ethics, especially in relation to divine grace, would be rather meaningless.

At the same time, any basis of ethics cannot be adequate in the absence of a doctrine of redemption insofar as our being can be badly formed and, indeed, is badly formed, according to the doctrine of sin. The slavery at the heart of our being determines the sinfulness of our acts, and can be broken only by redemption. If not because of redemption, if not because of a radical reorientation of the created order through Christ, death will have the last word, and humanity will never attain to eschatological destiny, but instead will negate it. To attach undue importance to ethical decision or action runs the risk of treating human life as merely a series of points and of throwing too great a weight on a certain conception of human autonomy at the expense of grace. We cannot escape from the fact that without redemption, ethics is nothing but the shadow of what it should be.

In addition, we cannot simply set out on our way forwards without being turned about. For there has to be a re-forming before there can be a forming. We become ethical not by imitating Jesus Christ, but by being brought into a relation to God the Father through the Son and by the Spirit. "Imitation of Christ" is Christologically deficient, for it detaches from God's grace our obligation to what we are created to become, to the perfection to which we are called. To be sure, sin apart, Jesus is like us in all things. However, this "sin apart" is too great a disanalogy for Jesus to be interpreted as a role model, a magnifying version of ourselves. Jesus' history is his, not ours, since he is divine and thus unique. Otherwise, it would not only understate the fallenness of human depravity, but Jesus would seem to be reproducible in some manner, blurring the distinction between Christ and the Christian. Our fallenness, our turning backwards, requires redemption, which *precedes* ethics. Only then will the latter's eschatological orientation turn the moral agent outwards, away from self-realisation, to conformity to the image of God, which is Jesus Christ.

Indeed, if there has to be only one doctrine to be the sole foundation of ethics, we argue that it should be the image of God rather than the kingdom of God. Ideally, however, the doctrine of redemption should still be made explicitly thematic in any construction of ethics in order to do justice to the radicality and universality of sin, even though the Christological foundation of Pannenberg's concept of the image of God is soteriological, as shown in Chapter 2. Christologically, the idea of the image of God carries a sense of obligation, insofar as Jesus' history gives a task to us who are to be transformed. By bestowing new identity to us and incorporating us into

itself, it evokes human action in analogy to Jesus rather than simply inviting us to make a decision to follow him.

Equally important is Pannenberg's stated objective of his theological ethics as well as of his overall systematic theology. He states, "Theological ethics will relate this eschatological perspective to the reality of human creation, as that was already the case paradigmatically in the message of Jesus. The eschatological future has as its content the consummation of creation."¹²⁹ As mentioned above, unlike the early Pannenberg, one of the major advancements in his ethical thought is to be found in the established connection between the eschatological horizon and created human nature. For the rest of his theology, Pannenberg also finds it fundamentally important to link creation and eschatology together, and therefore sees the Christian God as the Author and Finisher of the human world, which is the theme of God's economy of salvation from creation to eschatology. Here, we argue that Pannenberg's concept of the image of God, as defined in Chapter 2, is able to provide precisely this link in a more effective way. As such, we believe that *the image of God, which constitutes the worth of individual human life and finds its expression in fellowship with God, is the true ground of ethics.*

Only in terms of our destiny, to be in the image of God, does our moral self-determination or ethical autonomy find a firm and solid basis. We recall from previous discussion that the image of God is already present in human beings in outline form by creation, thereby providing to human life a direction, though the definitive form of the image of God as the human destiny can be actualised only in another existence. It follows that since our destiny is set with our creation in the divine image, we are destined for fellowship with God from the very outset as God's creatures. Thus, the image of God does not merely provide the link, but rather is itself the link between creation and eschatology. Crucially, this intrinsic notion of continuity fits naturally well with concepts such as consummation and fulfilment. For all imply that the present is incomplete or provisional, and at the same time what is in store is not a radical departure, but instead a completion of that which has commenced, a fulfilment of what is hoped for. The process from disposition to actualisation corresponds, biblically, to the Pauline thought of a transformation of the old I into the new.

Moreover, just as in the case of the kingdom of God, the future enters the present and exerts influence, or to be more precise, the divine future enters the profane history and claims it, though our destiny is not directly present to human consciousness. The image of God has determinative power throughout the history of human creation, and present existence is to be understood from the point of view of this future reality. The direction of force is certainly from the future. In this way, Pannenberg can preserve emphasis on God's initiation, on God's grace. The suffering, the humbled and the deprived are to be ennobled by the reflection of the dignity of the divine image that none of us has by merit and, equally, that none of us can extinguish. As emphasised throughout Chapter 2, the image of God is not a goal to be realised by way of human action. In other words, actualising the disposition for divine likeness is not a task for us to perform on our own, even though our participation – that is,

129 Ibid., p. 86.

our active participation in the process of our own history – is not to be excluded. Only God can cause the image of himself to shine in us. Nonetheless, it is the source of inspiration of human ethical action in the sense of its disposition, orientation and encouragement. This corresponds to the Platonic idea of the good and its priority to all human actions. Indeed, theological ethics is all about the acceptance of our life as a gift, as human creation finds its fulfilment in the fellowship with God. Pannenberg asserts that “the ethically closest conclusion from fellowship with God is the participation in the movement of his love to his creatures, therefore morality itself.”¹³⁰ The eternal communion with God also means a participation in God’s eternal life and righteousness.

It is important to bear in mind that under Pannenberg’s definition of the image of God, human beings are created with a disposition *towards* completion rather than with a ready-made perfection, and their sin is understood as a falling short of their potentiality. The image of God or human destiny for fellowship with God finds its full realisation in the relation of the Son Jesus Christ to his heavenly Father, in which Christians are included through faith and baptism. For Pannenberg, its realisation in Jesus’ relation to the Father is the final benchmark for Christian ethical opinions on human destiny. Interestingly, in *Grundlagen der Ethik*, Pannenberg seems to recall us implicitly to Herder’s insight into the idea of the image of God: “The Christian life is thus nothing other than a truly natural life, if we understand it as the realisation of human destiny to an unrestricted, free humanity. That and nothing else is the topic of Christian ethics: introduction to *Humanität*.”¹³¹ In Chapter 2, we concluded that *Humanität* is that which gives to individuals their humanness, and at the same time that which recalls individuals to their human destiny.¹³² Hence, the human goal is simply to be human, and it belongs to man’s human essence to realise his God-given destiny. This represents the core message of the idea of the image of God. Pannenberg writes, “In an ethics of change man and his social environment are seen as part of a process. Man is on a path from what he actually is to what he potentially is and is destined to be.”¹³³ However, only through faith and baptism are human beings lifted definitively beyond themselves, beyond their self-interest.

When ethics is understood in this way, we can then be able to see *in a new light* whether human destiny is eschatological or ethical. It is easy and indeed tempting to conclude that human destiny is eschatological, grounded in the kingdom of God, though there are ethical implications. However, when ethics or what is ethical is conceived as being founded on the universally valid anthropological basis and the image of God, it should not be reduced to nothing more than a by-product or some ramification of what is eschatological. Rather, the realisation of our eschatological destiny should be seen as the completion of our ethical task *at the same time*. This is also more in line with Pannenberg’s intention to bring dogmatics and ethics into a more or less equal relationship rather than one that is subject to subordination. To be

130 Pannenberg, “Moral und Religion”, p. 89.

131 Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik*, p. 87.

132 For a fuller discussion of *Humanität*, see the first section of Chapter 2.

133 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Christian Morality and Political Issues”, in *Faith and Reality*, trans. John Maxwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 133.

otherwise would betray the profundity of what is ethical and what is eschatological. Perhaps, if one must label the term, it would be closer to the mark to understand “human destiny” as eschatological in essence and ethical in nature, thereby also without undercutting our capacity to respond freely to it.

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Chapter 6

Theological Anthropology: Destiny-centred, History-focused

In the foregoing chapters, we have seen that Pannenberg lifts before us the possibility of combining the rich resources of theology and anthropology in articulating an authentic understanding of human existence and human destiny. As already pointed out in Chapter 1, however, this combination for Pannenberg takes the form of a fundamental-theological anthropology, as he brackets virtually all the Christian doctrines. We have argued that this is unsatisfactory. Given the way in which the concept of human destiny is defined by Pannenberg, we believe that the inclusion of his Christological and other dogmatic expositions is inescapable, and indeed desirable. That is precisely how our arguments have proceeded in the preceding chapters. We have made a conscious effort to fill in those doctrinal gaps left undeveloped by Pannenberg.

Perhaps, discerning readers would notice that our discussion thus far has revolved around several key concepts, namely nature, essence and destiny of humanity, as well as theological themes, such as creation, image of God, sin, salvation and eschatology. There is also the favourite expression, history, which is characteristic of Pannenberg's thought. But what do we make of all these *collectively*? Can we draw a coherent picture to tie them together? This is the task we set for ourselves in this final chapter.

To begin with, we have to recognise that the crux of Pannenberg's anthropological turn, which aims at the purpose of human creation and the destiny of humanity, goes beyond a simple demonstration of the intellectual respectability of Christian faith in a secular society. He allows his theological thinking and preference to be informed and shaped by it. In this way, Pannenberg differentiates himself from those other contemporary theologians who are also keen to establish dialogue with other disciplines. For Pannenberg, this is most vividly demonstrated in his doctrines of the image of God and sin. In both cases, his anthropological turn is intended not simply to highlight the coherence of theology with secular knowledge, but to assign anthropology a fundamental role in actually helping formulate the doctrines themselves, as shown in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively.¹

Conversely, foundational to Pannenberg's anthropology is Herder's idea of the image of God. The connection of the ideas of the image of God and human destiny embraces, for Herder, the whole of human reality, the whole process of human history as a history of education to humanity. For both Herder and Pannenberg, the image

¹ In addition, we have just seen in the previous chapter how highly anthropology is regarded by Pannenberg in the formulation of the foundation of ethics.

of God is already present in human beings in outline form via creation, thereby providing to human life a direction, though the definitive form of the image of God as the human destiny can be actualised only in another existence. However, we argued in Chapter 2 that Pannenberg differentiates himself from Herder in a crucial respect, in that Pannenberg grounds Herder's anthropology on a Christological foundation in order to present a salvific, rather than a providential, account of the renewal of the *imago Dei*. Pannenberg claims that the image of God is realised not from the beginning, but through the destiny of humanity, which lies yet in the future. This allows him to place the image of God in relation not only to creation, but also to salvation and eschatology. Indeed, this specific idea of the image of God is probably the most distinct theological claim in Pannenberg's anthropology, and forms the starting point upon which the rest of his anthropology is constructed.

Developing alongside the conception of the image of God is the idea of human openness to the world, which makes it possible for human beings to develop rational processes, languages, cultures, and even trust. In this way, humans are able to convert the disadvantages of their initial biological condition into advantages. Openness to the world becomes, for Pannenberg, the bridge out of the poverty of the natural beginning point of humanity into the full realisation of human destiny. For him, openness to the world is the modern secular anthropological equivalent of the expression of the image of God, in the same way that the former's human openness corresponds to the latter's human becoming, as the question of himself, the question of his own destiny, and the question of the ground beyond the world that sustains it and his life are one and the same question. However, it is important to bear in mind that the concept of openness on its own, as conceived by Pannenberg, does not presuppose from where or to where this openness leads us. As such, it does not amount to an anthropological proof of the existence of God. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the concept is unimportant. Pannenberg argues, "The dogma of Chalcedon possesses in the openness of human being to God an anthropological presupposition without which it would be meaningless. For only under this presupposition is there no deformation of the genuinely human reality of Jesus when Christian theology asserts that he received his personality, which integrated his life into a totality, from the Father, through his personal community with the Father, and that this personality was that of the Son of God."² Indeed, the human disposition to God finds expression in openness to the world; or, openness to the world constitutes the human disposition to God. In short, it is by way of our human essence, as derived from our incomplete image of God and as expressed in openness beyond the world, that we are destined for fellowship with God as the full realisation of that image. It is, therefore, misleading for Shults to describe, the "dynamic structure of personal human existence (exocentricity) is the creaturely condition for being formed into the

2 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 345. For Pannenberg, the openness that characterises Jesus' humanity in his dedication to the Father and shows him to be the Son constitutes his personal identity with the Son.

image of the Son.”³ If anything, it would be the image of God that constitutes our creaturely condition, which makes human openness or exocentricity possible.

We have shown that in Pannenberg’s anthropology, the historical uniqueness of the saving event calls for a conception of human history as starting with a state of pure openness, which in the light of its future fulfilment can be understood precisely as a destination to that fulfilment. In other words, the way of looking at the human being is presupposed in Pannenberg’s idea of the divine image as not ready-made in the beginning, but requiring to be completed. In this way, the impressiveness of Pannenberg’s conception can be seen in the way in which he makes *the eschatological perspective anthropologically unavoidable, as he ties it to the formation and completion of human selfhood*. Thus, human identity is in a process of becoming throughout the history of humanity. Only at the end of history in the context of the completed whole of reality will it be apparent what each person is becoming during the course of history. We have also argued that Pannenberg’s idea of the image of God provides the basis and framework for linking creation to eschatology. The image of God, in which the first human being was created but which is brought to completion only by Jesus Christ, serves as the clamp that holds the beginning and the end of this process together in the unity of a single history of the human race. In other words, Pannenberg does not envision an unbridgeable gap between creation and eschatology. Rather, the eschaton is related to the beginning as its successful and ultimate fulfilment. Creation and eschatology belong together, for it is only in the eschatological consummation that the destiny of creatures, especially human creatures, will come to fulfilment. In their openness beyond the world, human creatures open themselves to the future as the dimension from which alone their existence can achieve content and fulfilment. Thus, the beginning is merely the beginning of that which will attain its full form and true individuality only at the end. Only in the light of the eschatological consummation can humans understand the meaning of their beginning. Or, to be more precise, the teleology of temporal existence is to be found in eternity. The goal supports the quest.

For Pannenberg, for human beings to be as historical beings is not only the goal, but also the movement of the history that leads to the goal. This movement derives its unity from the future by which it will be completed. Insofar as the entire course of the world from creation until the future end of the world is conceived as a history of divine action that embraces all nations and even nature, it is the divine subject rather than the human subject that guarantees the unity of history. Properly understood, Pannenberg’s theology speaks not only of a destiny that is common to us all, but also of a God who is universal and upon whom all things are contingent. Moreover, it is only in the light of the conclusion, namely of eschatology, that material definition can be given to this one divine act that spans the whole economy of salvation. Of course, the origin and the consummation do not coincide. They form a unity only from the standpoint of the divine act of creation. The unity of such an act precedes time and thereby the distinction of beginning and end in the usual sense. As a result, God is not merely the First, nor is he only the Last. He transcends the alternative of

3 F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 237.

beginning and end, and is Lord of both. That is why God is said to be the First *and* the Last (Isa. 44:6, 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13).

Pannenberg claims, "History itself, as the embodiment of the divine action, was understood in Israel to be a goal-oriented process in the course of which human aims are constantly frustrated, whereas God through this very frustration pursues the goal he intends in his dealings with human beings."⁴ This assertion of Pannenberg amounts essentially to a form of expression about the power of the future over the present that leads to a new idea of creation, oriented not towards a primeval event in the past, but towards the eschatological future. Instead of simply being a beginning, creaturely reality itself is a process oriented to a future consummation. In the course of our study, we have emphasised repeatedly the importance of the historicity of human beings, who in the face of their still open future are on their way to the fulfilment of their destiny. The core message of Chapter 2 was to state it Christologically that insofar as the saving consummation of creation can be expected only from God's eschatological work of salvation in Jesus Christ, we are by creation oriented to the coming of the second Adam. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this ontological and noetic orientation to God and fellowship with him is likely to be undefined and unthematic. An important corollary for Pannenberg is that the Christian view of the human race as a history that runs from the first Adam to the new and final Adam has replaced the philosophical concept of an immutable human nature with a concept of humans as historical beings or, rather, as caught up in the movement of that concrete history.

To be sure, if the history of the human race is to be a formative process leading to a fulfilled humanity, it can be such only under the guidance of divine providence, which need not be understood as a determination of events prior to the actual course of history. God strives for and reaches his ends not apart from human beings, but with the cooperation of his creatures and through the conflicts between human purposes and interests. In the process, the working of divine providence in human history is by no means wholly hidden from them. Looking back, at least, they can see connections between events that they may regard as traces of providence. Yet they may repress such knowledge, just as they may contest the existence of God. This is the reality of the incomplete history of the world. Thus, special revelation is required for advance declaration of the goal of God's creations. For Pannenberg, this revelation can be found in the history of Jesus Christ. True, as Pannenberg says, the process of self-realisation of God in Jesus Christ is so little completed that the Christian message of love and reconciliation seems to be impotent, compared with the secular economic and political power or the egoistic desire of human individuals.⁵ However, this problem is rooted in the unfinished character of the historical process that challenges our ability to grasp the whole of human reality. We have pointed out consistently that for Pannenberg, in the work of Jesus Christ or in the light of the history of Jesus Christ the eschatological future of the world has already broken in to our salvation.

4 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 494.

5 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Christologie und Theologie", *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21 (1975): 173.

It follows that in God's act the economy of salvation aims at his creatures. Even though from time to time they have strayed from the path of their destiny, God still seeks to lead them to the goal for which they are created.

Without doubt, despite our image of God, the way from disposition to actualisation of human destiny is always and everywhere broken by sin. In Chapter 4, we argued the case for defining sin explicitly in relation to human destiny, namely as passivity to destiny. Through our consciousness of our own destination, we know ourselves to be responsible for our own condition and activity and for turning the natural and social givens of our own life situation into a fulfilment of our destiny. The consciousness of the failure of the self, namely sin, is a necessary phase in the process whereby humans are liberated to become themselves and to identify themselves with those qualities within them which they judge to be incompatible with their selfhood. Sin is a frightening reality that is opposed not only to the whole meaning of life, but also to the real essence of humanity. If the being of humans is connected with our as yet unfulfilled destiny, sin would take us away from the future to which we are destined and to which we are meant to be on the way. In our sin, we are robbed of our true identity, and the separation of sinners from God means at the same time our separation from our own destiny, which is communion with God. The destructive and tragic character of sin has to be seen in this light. Sin is against our destiny in its origin and in its end. It has reality only as a deformation of our being, our essence, which is to realise our destiny. We as human beings owe it to ourselves – that is, to the true self of our as yet unrealised destiny – to correspond to the destiny of ours. We see sin as sin before God, and therefore in relation to the human destiny that has been reflected in Christ. In other words, the concept of passivity as sin is to be understood in the perspective of the human destiny that has its ground in God and has been revealed in Christ. Pannenberg writes, “With the presence of Jesus God met the longing for fulfilment that he had planted in his human creatures and that had found expression in the symbolism of eschatological expectations.”⁶

To be more precise, those eschatological expectations are not grounded in Jesus Christ as such, but in his resurrection. Pannenberg has made great strides in the recovery of continuity with early Christianity by making resurrection, as opposed to incarnation, the organising centre around which Christian thought revolves. The pivotal status of this one event of Jesus' resurrection, which belongs both to human history and to a time beyond time, is of crucial significance to Pannenberg's Christology and anthropology. As the end of all things has already occurred in Jesus' resurrection, it can be said that the ultimate is already present in him. Or, to put it more elegantly, the image of God as the destiny of humanity is completed by, and proleptically present in, Jesus Christ. This is another central and distinct theological claim of Pannenberg's anthropology. In other words, the final state of affairs is proleptically in an ontological rather than simply metaphorical sense in Jesus' life. For Pannenberg, therefore, prolepsis implies retrospective causation in the sense that Jesus' unity with God for the whole of his humanity is true from all eternity *because* of Jesus' resurrection. Put in another way, Jesus' essence is established retroactively

6 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991–98), 3:550.

from the perspective of the end of his life, from his resurrection, not only for our knowledge but in its being.

Insofar as the coming of Jesus Christ actually inaugurates the process that human beings are to be renewed ontologically and their destiny fulfilled definitively, *the appearance of Jesus Christ has to be seen as the completion of creation*. What has previously been regarded as humanity is now replaced by a radically new kind of humanity as a result of the appearance of Jesus Christ through participation in his obedience, in his death and resurrection. In other words, creation of all things is mediated through Jesus Christ. His mediation of creation is not to be thought of primarily in terms of the temporal beginning of the world. This ties in with Pannenberg's view that creation is not to be understood as an act that happened centuries ago, the results of which involve us in the present. Rather, the creation of all things, including those belonging to the past, takes place out of the ultimate future, for only from the perspective of the end are all things what they truly are. It is only in the eschaton that God's eternal act of creation will be entirely unfolded, and only then will what is created out of God's eternity be consummated in the accomplishment of its own temporal becoming. Hence, all things are to be understood from the perspective of their eschatological fulfilment, rather than from that of the beginning of the world. Pannenberg points out, "In the message of Jesus, creation and the eschatological future belong together most intimately."⁷ He criticises that theology has not yet recognised the task involved in this fact.

For Pannenberg, it is important to situate Jesus in the history of humanity in order to grasp Jesus' relation to human creation. Jesus is the ruling centre of history by virtue of his divine predestination. As stated in Chapter 5, the lordship of Jesus over the cosmos is expressed in the factuality of the creation of all things, not merely towards him, but also through him. The predestination of all things towards Jesus, their eschatological summation through Jesus, is identical with their creation through Jesus. Jesus anticipates the end of history, for he himself is the end and the purpose of this history. For Pannenberg, the essence of all things is to be defined ultimately in the light of him, for their essence is decided on the basis of their orientation to him. Every creature receives through him as the eschatological judge its ultimate illumination, its ultimate place, and its ultimate definition in the context of the whole creation. Indeed, insofar as the Son's moving out of the unity of the divine life makes independent creaturely existence possible, Pannenberg claims that "the Son 'sustains' the universe (Heb. 1:3) in its creaturely autonomy distinct from God and forms the goal of the divine world government inasmuch as this directs the course of the times to their fulfilment in such a way as 'to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1:10), i.e., in such a way that all created things participate in the filial relation of Jesus Christ to the Father, in the fellowship with the Father that is mediated by self-distinction from him."⁸

In the previous chapters, it has been shown that Christology and anthropology are inseparably related to each other in Pannenberg. This comes not only in the sense

7 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The God of Hope", in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 3 vols, trans. George H. Kehm and R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970–73), 2:243.

8 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:58.

that Jesus transforms the understanding as well as the being of humanity, but also that anthropology depicts the universal truth of Christology whereas Christology expresses the concrete, definitive form of the anthropological destiny of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, as far as human destiny is concerned, *Christology can be regarded as the completion of anthropology*. As a result, all that preceded the earthly appearance of Jesus is nothing but a shadowy prefiguration of the truth that has finally come to light in him. At the same time, to study humanity, the first Christological presupposition for Pannenberg is the fundamental correspondence between the proleptic and eschatological structure of the history of Jesus and the proleptic and eschatological constitution of humanity and the world.

By now, it should have been obvious that the theological anthropology as delineated in this study is a theology of history as much as a theology of anthropology. Here, these two present themselves as a powerful combination. On the one hand, anthropology, as a basis to history, has for its purpose to bring to light a universal, essential humanness that is always valid. On the other, we have presented history as a way to map out the movement of humanity over the course of its history to its common destiny from creation through sin and ethics to eschatology, for the essence of history is change. Thus, anthropology has been taken as the starting point for our study, which presents openness to the world or exocentricity as an anthropological constant to historicity. Indeed, historicity can be seen to have its anthropological roots in the capacity of human beings to distance themselves from their environment. In addition, the course of history is comparable to the exocentricity of human life to the extent that it constantly moves beyond all that is at hand and given. Indeed, the fulfilment that is the goal of human beings in history transcends the limits of every historical present and is attainable only beyond it.

Looking at it in another way, anthropology by nature is abstract, and therefore must be brought into dialogue with concrete history, which depicts the development of those features or dispositions that constitute human nature. After all, human beings live their concrete lives in history. Pannenberg himself also believes that “it is only through historical portrayal that one comes as close as possible to the actual course of the concrete life of man ... For this reason, historical writing is called upon to complete the anthropological task as far as this is humanly possible.”⁹ The ultimate goal of our task in this study is to describe humanity in its concreteness, not simply to locate abstract and identical structures of humanness. Hence, our study can be described as *a theological anthropology in a historical perspective*, as opposed to Pannenberg’s secular anthropology in a theological perspective.

Theological claims of anthropology cannot be expressed in a non-historical way. In other words, the foundation of theological anthropology must not be separated from history, which provides a perspective on the still open future of humanity. Insofar as reality does not have a history but is itself history, all reality is seen as the history of God’s self-revelation in creation, for God acts in history. At the same time, God has to be understood as the determining power in the course of history. Moreover, to the extent that history is bound up with sin and death, all reality is

9 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Toward a Theology of the History of Religions”, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 2:78.

also the history of God's redemptive activity. God overcomes the alienation of human creations from their destiny. However, the tension within the human creature between centrality and exocentricity raises inevitably the question of an ethical life, even though what human beings do in history cannot be by themselves conclusive for their destiny. Indeed, the universal spreading of the power of sin in human living characterises the realism of Christian anthropology and ethics. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Pannenberg, our question of human destiny, which becomes thematic in the process of the identity formation, belongs closely together with the question of the good. Human destiny for fellowship with God, which is the highest good for human beings, forms the first anthropological standpoint constitutive for a Christian ethic. In Chapter 5, we have also argued that the image of God as human destiny is the true ground of ethics. As a result, our emphasis on God's initiation, on God's grace can be preserved. For the image of God is not a goal to be realised by way of human action, and is the source of inspiration of human ethical action in the sense of its disposition, orientation and encouragement. Moreover, theological ethics is all about the acceptance of our life as a gift, as human creation finds its fulfilment in the fellowship with God. Thus, the realisation of our eschatological destiny should be seen as the completion of our ethical task *at the same time*.

The above argument seems all the more reasonable when consciousness of morality is understood not as a set of demands from outside, but as the call of the human being's own selfhood. Human beings find the gravity of their Christian living as they look forwards to the end of sin. For Pannenberg, believers are called to live in the light of Jesus' resurrection, to enter into the order of that "new life" which has already appeared in Jesus Christ. Hence, every invocation to sanctification is essentially a call to *reactivate and relive* what has already happened and what is already given to us. This is the real meaning of being crucified and dead with Christ. Pannenberg writes, "The Christian life is thus nothing other than a truly natural life, if we understand it as the realisation of human destiny to an unrestricted, free humanity."¹⁰ This destiny finds expression for individuals in their experience of obligations to live as human beings. In other words, the human goal is simply to be human, and it belongs to their human essence to realise their God-given destiny. Upon realisation, human essence would then equate to human destiny. Human destiny is not external to the self but resonates with the exocentric character of human essence. The essence of the human being is seen as a destiny that will be attained only in the future. This represents the core message of the idea of the image of God. In addition, although we say at the beginning that this study is not meant to be a general anthropology, it is hard to imagine that any anthropology can avoid centring on the essence and destiny of humanity. For there is nothing more central to our understanding of humanity and human existence than that in any anthropology, especially in theological anthropology.

Another element that need be reshaped slightly is that insofar as human destiny is attainable only beyond human action and beyond history, it is *necessarily* not so much a goal as a way, though Pannenberg himself has not put it in these terms.

10 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundlagen der Ethik: Philosophisch-Theologische Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 87.

Thus, the kind of life we are called to live as Christians is better understood as a journey rather than a destination. Our essence tells us the kind of persons we must be if we are to face the nature of our existence with courage and faithfulness. The road to perfection is full of pitfalls, and it is a road so long that one can question legitimately whether anyone comes to the end of it in this life. Nonetheless, victory is already promised, but is realised only in the struggle of faith and prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, the attainment of that victory is not the product of our effort, but rather is inseparable from a process of active cooperation with the grace of God. That is why the Scripture speaks of a cleansing by the blood of Christ and a faithful preservation until the end. Of course, what we are offered as Christians is not a formula for successful living, but a way to go on, such that we will be able to look back over our lives in the fullness of time, claiming them as ours.

All of this points us back to the importance of history. Indeed, Pannenberg defines human nature not as some human element in its natural origin, nor as the natural conditions of human existence. Instead, “human nature *is* the history of the realisation of human destiny.”¹¹ For Pannenberg, history as a formative process is the way to the future to which the human being is destined. In other words, he is on a path from what he actually is to what he potentially is and is destined to be. More simply, he is on the way to becoming himself. As long as the journey is incomplete, it can be described only in terms anticipatory of its end and goal, in the light of which the human being grasps the meaning of his life and the task life sets it. Cristescu points out succinctly in biblical terms, “The decisive element in Christian anthropology is not the correspondence with the first Adam, but the way from the first to the second Adam. As the second Adam, Christ establishes the historical and eschatological truth of humanity. This truth implies that human beings as historical beings now have to be understood in relation to the salvation that has appeared in Christ.”¹² This view gives due recognition to the definitive importance of the salvation of Jesus Christ in anthropology.

In fact, we believe that it is the idea of salvation or the wholeness of life, and therefore human fulfilment or consummation, that pulls together the three important dimensions of humanity – nature, essence and destiny – and unites them as one. For only through the granting of salvation is human essence realised and does human destiny become identical with present existence. At that point, the human being is also united in his present with his past and his future, such that nature is brought into completion, essence is fully realised, and destiny is ultimately fulfilled in a time beyond time when sin is no more and tears are wiped away in the joyful manifestation of the divine love, amid the full presence of the glory of God. Despite our creatureliness, we may then participate in the fellowship with the eternal life of our God, the Creator and Finisher of the world.

11 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 24.

12 Vasile Cristescu, *Die Anthropologie und ihre christologische Begründung bei Wolfhart Pannenberg und Dumitru Staniloae* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 83–4.

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