

# **The Reception of Anselm in the *Systematic Theology* of Wolfhart Pannenberg: A Genetic Investigation**

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Can the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian Pannenberg, influenced by German Idealism and Heidegger, do justice to the monastic mind of St. Anselm of Canterbury?

*The article examines Wolfhart Pannenberg's (1928-2014) appropriation of Anselmic thought. This is intriguing for several reasons: 1. As Anselm was the great mind in the outgoing 11<sup>th</sup> century, Pannenberg is the noted Protestant thinker of the outgoing 20<sup>th</sup> century; 2. The unity of philosophy and theology Anselm assumes is torn asunder by modernity; 3. As a Lutheran Pannenberg approaches Anselm with a different understanding of the *conditio humana*; and 4. The worldview operative for Pannenberg is that of German Idealism. The question the essay attempts to answer is whether such an intellectual background can do justice to the genius that is Anselm of Canterbury?*

## **Introduction—Ecumenical Accentuations**

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014) was one of the most creative and internationally respected Protestant thinkers of the second half of the past century. His magnum opus *Systematische Theologie* in three volumes<sup>1</sup> need not shy comparison with Karl Barth's, Dumitru Stăniloae's, Karl Rahner's or Hans Urs von Balthasar's monumental, comprehensive presentations of Christian theology. From 1968 until becoming emeritus, he taught in Munich. His bibliography lists no less than 750 titles. He received honorary doctoral degrees from Glasgow, Manchester, Trinity College, Dublin, St. Andrews, Cambridge, Comillas, Madrid, and Cluj, Romania.<sup>2</sup> Pannenberg was born to secularized Lutheran parents in 1928 in Stettin, Germany, as the son of a German civil servant. A keen sense of *Pflichtbewußtsein*, of duty, was the ruling ethos. Towards the end of World War II, he had a religious experience that would set the tenor for the rest of his life:

On January 6, 1945, on my way home from music lessons, a long walk from one town to another, I had a visionary experience of a great light not only surrounding me, but absorbing me for an indefinite time. I did not hear any words, but it was a metaphysical awakening that prompted me to search for its meaning regarding my life during the following years.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, 3 Bände (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988/1991/1993).

<sup>2</sup> Gunther Wenz, *Introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology* (Bristol: CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), pp. 13-22. Timothy Bradshaw, *Pannenberg: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), pp. 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Root, "The Achievement of Wolfhart Pannenberg," in *First Things*, March, 2012, <https://firstthings.com/article/2012/03/the-achievement-of-wolfhart-pannenberg>, accessed March 12, 2017, pp. 1-13, at p. 3.

This explains Pannenberg's openness for the epiphanic of the Divine in the world and his desire to organize theology around the notion of revelation as something concrete occurring in time and space. While he agrees with Barth that the Word is important, the historical event is necessary to reveal the agent and his message. "[N]either through His name, nor His Word, nor even through Law and Gospel is God directly revealed. . . . His self-disclosure is instead completed in an indirect manner, through God's action in history."<sup>4</sup> The post-liberal Presbyterian theologian William Placher (1948-2008) described his *Systematic Theology* as "revealed to reason."<sup>5</sup> The historic Jesus reveals both his divine Father and discloses to humankind the meaning of history. Thus, Pannenberg makes the audacious claim that the doctrine of the trinitarian God is the all-encompassing truth of the totality of reality.

His thoughts must be localized in the intersection of the coordinates between his teachers of philosophy Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Karl Löwith (1897-1973), and his theological teachers Gerhard von Rad (1901-71), Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Edmund Schlink (1903-84).<sup>6</sup>

The German theologian Pannenberg wrote his 1953 doctoral thesis on Duns Scotus' understanding of predestination.<sup>7</sup> This is followed by his *Habilitation* on the term "analogy" in the medieval understanding of God. There he investigates the concept of analogy as developed in ancient Greece and as appropriated during the Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup> The concept of analogy is a problematic one in Protestant anthropology as numerous past discussions highlight. Famously, the early Karl Barth—who had also written an important title on Anselm, in fact for his own theological endeavor seminal book on Anselm<sup>9</sup>—had called the *analogia entis* "the invention of the anti-Christ."<sup>10</sup> Barth considered the Word accessible to faith alone. Pannenberg begs to differ. Interestingly, Barth entitles his magnum opus *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>11</sup> while Pannenberg titles his *Systematic Theology*—a concept which is anathema to Barth. In 1961, the programmatic book

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<sup>4</sup> Wenz, *Introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology*, pp. 17f. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan 1968), pp. 8ff.

<sup>5</sup> William Placher, "Revealed to Reason: Theology as 'Normal Science,'" in *The Christian Century* 109 (1992), pp. 194ff.

<sup>6</sup> Wenz, *Introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology*, pp. 13-22. Bradshaw, *Pannenberg: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 1-7.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Die Prädestinationslehre des Duns Skotus im Zusammenhang der scholastischen Lehrentwicklung*, in *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 4, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1954).

<sup>8</sup> This *Habilitation* only exists in its typewritten form: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Analogie und Offenbarung. Eine kritische Untersuchung der Geschichte des Analogiebegriffs in der Gotteserkenntnis*, 1955. Wenz, *Introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology*, p. 13, fn. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of God's Existence in the Context of his Theological Scheme* (London: SCM, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," in H. Martin Rumscheidt, ed., *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vols. 1-5 (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

*Offenbarung als Geschichte* appears, with Pannenberg as contributing editor.<sup>12</sup> It demarcates his disagreement with the existential hermeneutics of Bultmann and an understanding of revelation that criticizes the critique of religion as institution à la Barth. He discovers the universal historical dimensions of revelation as the all-encompassing medium of God's self-communication. Such a universal orientation intends preventing revelation from degenerating into a language play and calls on theologians to apply the historical-critical method. The historic resurrection of Christ anticipates the Eschaton. Such belief is evidenced as consonant with the Old Testament and Jewish apocalypticism.

Determining his own irenic ecumenical orientation, his dissertation director had been Edmund Schlink,<sup>13</sup> one of the Protestant observers present at Vatican Council II. The Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad had imparted to him an appreciation of God revealing Himself in history—the exodus, the exile, the return, etc. Thus, as mentioned above, indicative for his foundational orientation is a volume of essays with the programmatic title *Revelation as History*, edited by Pannenberg himself.<sup>14</sup> There he also summarized this innovative approach, inspired by von Rad.

It is little wonder that Catholic-Lutheran dialogue and ecumenical reconciliation were constant concerns of this theologian. While numerous Lutheran colleagues attacked the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) between the Catholic Church and the churches of the Lutheran World Federation,<sup>15</sup> he was one of its most prominent defenders. He even stated that in order to survive in a global and pluralistic world, some form of papacy is indispensable for Christianity. Rather than the denominations arising from the Reformation, such as his own Lutheran Church, he warns that only the Evangelical, Orthodox, and Catholic variants of Christianity may survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

At the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, it is fitting to investigate how and under what assumptions the Lutheran theologian Pannenberg appropriated Anselmian thought. In an age delighting in desisting from “a meta narrative”—to use a term François Lyotard had coined,<sup>17</sup>—Pannenberg is convinced that without the overarching truth of Jesus Christ the multifarious fragments of human existence become meaningless.

## First Contribution to Anselm Studies

<sup>12</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg (Hrsg.), *Offenbarung als Geschichte. Kerygma und Dogma Beiheft 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961, 5. Aufl., 1982) [English: *Revelation as History*, 1968].

<sup>13</sup> Jochen Eber, *Einheit der Kirche als ein dogmatisches Problem bei Edmund Schlink* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. William Rusch, George Limbeck, ed., *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Evangelische Überlegungen zum Petrusdienst des römischen Bischofs,” in Peter Hünemann, ed., *Papstamt und Ökumene* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1997), pp. 43-60.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. xxiv–xxv.

While still in Heidelberg, Pannenberg wrote a book review for Schmitt's then recently published Latin-German edition of the *Cur Deus Homo*.<sup>18</sup> This is his first recorded contribution to Anselm studies. Already this review so early in his career betrays his thorough knowledge of the Christian tradition. He notes Schmitt's extensive introduction (including a biography of Anselm), his literary achievements, and methodology. He underscores approvingly that to Schmitt's mind it is incorrect to analyze the text under the alternative of Anselm arguing either in favor of an exclusively logical necessity for the non-believer to accept Christ's redemptive works or for the need to assume faith in order to discover the salvific significance of the Cross. Significantly, Pannenberg sees Schmitt opening the question whether "logical insight moves beyond faith and then is independently from it logically conclusive."<sup>19</sup> As will be demonstrated later, this observation is revealing for Pannenberg's own position in the area of theological epistemology. Schmitt sees guaranteed in the apologetic nature of the *Cur Deus Homo* the inner unity of Anselm's seemingly contradictory formulations, which otherwise are difficult to reconcile. The young Lutheran theologian also quotes Schmitt as arguing that Anselm went beyond what his predecessor as abbot and archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc (1010-1089) considered legitimate, when attempting to apprehend faith rationally. Nevertheless, he grants that Anselm actually combatted rationalism in strong terms. While noting still room for minor improvements, Pannenberg registers the superior quality of the German translation.

### ***Jesus: God and Man* (1964)—The Anselmian Understanding of Satisfaction**

Here Pannenberg treats Anselm under the heading "The Christology of Vicarious Satisfaction" rather extensively for the first time. He sees the early medieval penitential practice inaugurating a shift away from the Patristic understanding as exemplified by Athanasius' *De Incarnatione*.<sup>20</sup> Man must now offer satisfaction to God, which he cannot perform. "Only the man Jesus, born without sin, can offer God a work of supererogation, the gift of his life."<sup>21</sup> He concludes that Anselm argues, in 1098 AD in the *Cur Deus Homo*, for Jesus as becoming the meritorious representative of humankind: "solvit pro peccatoribus quod pro se non debebat."<sup>22</sup> The emphasis is no longer on *homoiōsis theōi*, but on a compensation "accomplished in the gift of Jesus' life, is universally effective because Jesus is at the same time God, and the life he offers has, therefore, infinite worth."<sup>23</sup> He regrets that the dimension of deification is lost in the eleventh century.

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<sup>18</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Canterbury, Anselm von: *Cur Deus Homo*. Warum Gott Mensch geworden. Lateinisch und deutsch, Besorgt und übersetzt von F. S. Schmitt, O.S.B., (München: Kösel, 1956), 155 S. gr. 8°," in *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 3 (1957), pp. 203f.

<sup>19</sup> "... ob die logische Einsicht über den Glauben hinausschreitet und dann unabhängig von ihm in sich selbst schlüssig ist." Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: the treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. Penelope Lawson (New York: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Williams and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, OSB (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 2, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 43.

Pannenberg concludes: “therefore [for Anselm] it no longer depended directly upon the divinity of Jesus.”<sup>24</sup>

While adopted by Protestant mainstream theology in the seventeenth century and already stated by Melancthon, Pannenberg considers the theory of satisfaction foreign to an evangelical understanding of redemption. The Pauline understanding (cf. Col 2: 12) is dominant in the *Confessio Augustana*: “propter Christum per fidem ... Hanc fidem imputat Deus pro iustitia coram ipso” (CA 4).<sup>25</sup> The central characteristic of Alexandrian Christology is lost in the *Cur Deus Homo*. The incarnation no longer reveals Christ’s existence and fate *pro nobis*, but rather is now a forensic, necessary process within the Blessed Trinity.<sup>26</sup> At the same, with a nod to Hegel, he considers also as lost the eternal nature of the Blessed Trinity as spontaneous and one of “reciprocal self-dedication.”<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, he has praise for Anselm’s construction of the trinitarian dogma on the basis of the essence of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup> He grants that “The medieval penitential thought continually took its impulse from Jesus’ own call to repentance,” but denies that early Christendom understood the Cross as a work of satisfaction.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, he concedes Anselm rightly overcomes the infelicitous patristic notion of Jesus paying ransom to the devil.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in the process he sees Anselm coming perilously “close to Rabbinic Judaism’s understanding of the meritorious power of the suffering of the just.”<sup>31</sup> In contradistinction, Pannenberg prefers accentuating that God, the Father himself offered His life on the cross. Is this not akin to third century Patripassionism? In fact, Pannenberg continues:

we must probably assume or at least reckon with the fact that the expiatory character of Jesus’ death was not his own idea but one that emerged only in the light of his resurrection ... to represent Jesus’ death not as something that overtook him unexpectedly but as an objective toward which he systematically directed himself. The divine ‘must’, the divine plan, was transposed into Jesus’ own consciousness. Anselm took up this line of thought, especially in connection with the concept of ransom (Mark 10:45), which he understood not symbolically but literally in the light of the doctrine of penance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 43. Cf. Wohlfahrt Pannenberg, “Hintergründe des Streites um die Rechtfertigungslehre in der evangelischen Theologie, vortragen in der Sitzung vom 14. Januar 2000,” in *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte*, Jahrgang 2000, Heft 3 (München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), pp. 3-17, at p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Confessio Augustana* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, pp. 48f.

<sup>27</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 182. He cites Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. III (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), pp. 24f.

<sup>28</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 182, fn. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 276, citing *Cur Deus Homo* I, 7.8.

<sup>31</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 276.

<sup>32</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 277.

This Pannenberg considers to be the official Roman Catholic view.<sup>33</sup> Does, here, a low Christology express reservations only vis-à-vis Anselm's Platonism—which prioritizes the divine? This passage suggests that for Pannenberg Jesus became aware of his divinity only gradually, not knowing of his mission on earth, except *in actu* of the crucifixion or even *post factum*. Anselm stands robustly on the grounds of the *Chalcedonense*—Jesus, the God-man, fully God and fully man. Does perhaps Hegel's understanding of Jesus stand as model for Pannenberg?

He considers Luther apprehending Jesus' death as vicarious penal suffering and regrets Melancthon and Calvin returning to Anselm's theory of satisfaction, though supposedly revising it to have "the divine-human person" be the bearer of satisfaction.<sup>34</sup> Without providing an explanation, he views "Anselm's theory of satisfaction" presupposing a "Dyothelitism in its most dangerous extreme."<sup>35</sup> With little appreciation for Christian development of doctrine, Pannenberg implies support for the seventh century heresy of Monotheletism.

### ***Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 1988—Demonstrating the Unprovability of God with Anselm and Hegel***

In this volume he discusses proofs of God's existence. Following his Munich colleague Dieter Henrich (1927-) in the philosophy department, he sees Descartes putting the so-called ontological argument on "a wholly new foundation."<sup>36</sup> Revealingly, he does not problematize the term "ontological argument," coined thus only much after Anselm. It is important for Pannenberg to note that such conjectures rest on the *a priori* presupposition of God's existence, as inextricably God is part of the fabric of human nature.<sup>37</sup> Awareness of God is the condition for the possibility of all subsequent thoughts. This assumption of an all-perfect being is the starting point for both Anselm in the *Proslogion* and Descartes in the *Meditatio* III. Later Pannenberg shows that Anselm's notion of the *id quo maius cogitari nequit*—which Pannenberg never directly cites—as "the all-perfect God," is first used by Tertullian<sup>38</sup> to describe God, but was described earlier by Seneca.<sup>39</sup> Pannenberg mentions that Nicholas de Cusa will employ it again.<sup>40</sup> One wonders whether Pannenberg sufficiently sees a difference between Anselm's God as essentially accessible to the interior human person and Descartes' decidedly cerebral and impersonal *more geometrico* approach?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 350.

<sup>34</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 279.

<sup>35</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 295.

<sup>36</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 83. Cf. René Descartes, *Meditationes de prima Philosophia* (Paris: Soly, 1641), V, pp. 7ff. Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis. Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), pp. 10-22.

<sup>37</sup> He refers in this context to Descartes, *Meditatio* III, 26ff. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 84 and fn. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 2.5.

<sup>39</sup> Seneca, *Epistola* 52.1.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas de Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia* 1.5.4. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 443, fn. 233.

<sup>41</sup> René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, in: *Œuvres édition*, Charles Adam et Paul Tannery, AT VII (Paris: Vrin, 1997), p. 160.

On this historical background, he discusses Kant's and Hegel's contributions to this area of natural theology. His Idealist perspective permits him to view God not as extrinsic to the human being—which does indeed bring him into some proximity to Augustine and Anselm. Thus, a proof of God's existence “in the strict sense” is to his mind not possible, as the difference between subject and object in this case is unlike any other.<sup>42</sup> Ergo, any cosmological proof has an anthropological basis. The strict object-subject difference does not hold when it comes to God and the individual human being. This aspect is what he perceives as Anselm's most important point of agreement with Hegel's grand understanding of history. He sees Anselm's *unum argumentum* ultimately through the lens of Hegel and observes that it recognizes the inability to prove God's existence via finite things. “The unity of the concept and being of God does not first arise in human thought but in the revelation of the absolute idea for itself and also for us” (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III: ‘Absolute Religion’).<sup>43</sup> In his *Logic* Hegel viewed the ontological proof as a self-demonstration of God by his acts. God as the living God, and even more as the absolute Spirit, is known only in his acts. We are first to know him in his works. From these derive the definitions that we call his attributes, in which also his being is contained. Thus, the conceptual as knowledge of his works, i.e. himself, embraces the term “God” in his concept of being (*Logic*, II, 706). “If the ontological proof is understood thus as a self-demonstration of God, it ceases to be a proof of human thought, for we can conceive of the necessary being only abstractly and not with the full concreteness that corresponds to God's essence.”<sup>44</sup>

Correctly, Pannenberg recognizes in the *Monologion* Anselm's debt to Augustine's *De Trinitate* 9, visible in the triadic structure of *mens*, *notitia* and *amor*. He perceives Anselm's position as grounded in the trinitarian dogma of God as both unity and Trinity. While the African church father begins with *amor*, Anselm commences with *verbum* as fitting to the *summa natura* and the well-spring of all finite things. This occasions Anselm to meditate on the “inner word” which yearns for expression; on this point he sees *Monologion* 9-10 closely following *De Trinitate* 9.7.12. As love, the consubstantial Word or Son loves itself. Pannenburg notes that for Anselm it is difficult to think God in the personal differences of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Pannenberg, the Benedictine thinker must therefore ask rhetorically in *Monologion* 79 “What three?”<sup>45</sup>

### ***Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, 1991—Sin and Redemption**

He mentions Anselm only late in this volume. It occurs in the context of “sin and original sin.” He refers to Anselm's *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* as advancing the assumption that every newly created soul owes God original righteousness that had primordially

<sup>42</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 93.

<sup>43</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Pete C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 276.

<sup>44</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, pp. 94f, fn. 102.

<sup>45</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, p. 86, fn. 93 and 94.

been given to humankind as a species.<sup>46</sup> The mediatorial role of Jesus is traced back to Irenaeus<sup>47</sup> and Augustine<sup>48</sup> and is based on 1 Tim 2: 5: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . . .” As Augustine states, Jesus can only be mediator insofar as he has a human nature.<sup>49</sup> Then this concept of mediation is assuredly implicitly present in the background of Anselm’s theology of satisfaction as expressed in the *Cur Deus Homo*.<sup>50</sup>

Inter alia this Anselmian teaching, permits Pannenberg later to observe: “This vicarious penal suffering, which is rightly described as the vicarious suffering of the wrath of God at sin rests on the fellowship that Jesus Christ accepted with all of us sinners and with our fate as such. This link is the basis on which the death of Jesus can count as expiation for us.”<sup>51</sup> In the footnote to this statement he remarks: “Without this vicarious penal suffering, the expiatory function of the death of Jesus is unintelligible, unless we try to understand his death as an equivalent offered to God along the lines of Anselm’s satisfaction theory, which has no basis in the biblical data.”<sup>52</sup> He perceives Anselm’s position to be one of “exclusive representation or substitution” in Christ’s reconciling death on the cross. He draws the mental picture of Jesus having offered an “inclusive representation” by dying out of sheer love for humankind. Pannenberg assumes that this Hegelian distinction<sup>53</sup> can be traced back to the Protestant theologian Georg Friedrich Seiler (1733-1807) *Über den Versöhnungstod Jesu Christi*.<sup>54</sup> He criticizes Anselm for not bearing this nuance in mind and thereby rendering redemption something automatic and no longer something personal that expresses primarily divine philanthropy.<sup>55</sup>

“This thought of an inclusive representation relating to the incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ has shaped the whole history of Christian soteriology. It found classical expression in the early church interpretation of Christ as the new man from heaven. . . . It was also the presupposition of Anselm’s satisfaction theory, for only the incarnation of the Son establishes the relation to humanity that is the premise of the transferring of his merits to others (cf. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.19). In Anselm, however, this basic aspect plays only a subordinate part because he sought the basis of redemption in an achievement of the God-man for the Father. In Paul, however, Christ was linked to others precisely by the vicarious suffering of death as the punishment for sin.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* 2-6. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 254.

<sup>47</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus omnes Haereses*, 5.17.1.

<sup>48</sup> Augustine, PL 34, 1070; 35, 2122; 34, 1245. Pannenberg frequently refers to *Patrologia Graeca* and *Patrologia Latina*, rather than to more current and critical editions of the Church Fathers.

<sup>49</sup> See Augustine, *Confessiones* 10, 68 and *De Civitate Dei* 9.15.2.

<sup>50</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* 2.18; PL 158, 762ff.

<sup>51</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 427.

<sup>52</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 427, fn. 94.

<sup>53</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III (London: Routledge, 1896), p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> Georg Friedrich Seiler, *Über den Versöhnungstod Jesu Christi*, 2 vols. (Erlangen: Schleich, 1778 and Coburg: Ahl, 1779 respectively).

<sup>55</sup> The term “philanthropy” is used by the author in its patristic sense and permits divine charity to reach humankind and nevertheless guards divine ineffability, which the term “love” is less capable of doing.

<sup>56</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 431. Cf. Bradshaw, *Pannenberg: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 93.



## “The Rationality of Faith” (1992),<sup>57</sup>—the Drama of Subject and Object

In this dense essay, Pannenberg sees Christianity defending human rationality against ever again reappearing religious-mythical traditions. Christianity’s partiality to human reason is grounded in its missionary commission to transport the Logos to all peoples. He perceives that Anselm’s programmatic formula *fides quaerens intellectum* captures very well this quintessence of the theological enterprise.<sup>58</sup> Karl Barth appreciated human rationality as of relevance merely in supplying the basis for rational evidence for the connection of different, superordinate faith tenets.<sup>59</sup> This was not Anselm’s intention. Against Barth, Pannenberg mentions Anselm’s intention to prove the content of faith independently from the creed: *sola ratione*—a finite rationality enradicated somehow in the divine. Anselm had claimed to prove the contents of the Christian belief purely rationally in a most radical sense. Faith is merely assumed as an experiential foundation, but plays no role as a principle of argumentation.<sup>60</sup> This perspective incorporates Patristic anthropology: it regarded the image of God in man as an image of divine rationality, preserved even after the Fall—*nota bene* over and against Protestant anthropology, which considers both the *imago Dei* and the *similitudo Dei* irretrievably lost after the Fall. Pannenberg insists that this metaphysical constitution of reason does not serve as premises for Anselm’s methodical principle of *sola ratione*. However, unthematized *expressis verbis* by the Benedictine theologian, it does explain the reason for Anselm having supreme confidence that reasonable arguments cannot oppose the truth of God, but lead “in the rational retracing of the itself revealing matter” to insight into revealed verities, according to Pannenberg.<sup>61</sup>

In this context he mentions Augustine developing the *fides quaerens intellectum* principle to elucidate Scripture, but also to understand the Blessed Trinity. Pannenberg sees this as legitimizing the use of this principle to reach beyond “mere faith.”<sup>62</sup> This notwithstanding, Pannenberg quotes Augustine admitting there are limits to human knowledge of history: “*Alia sunt quae semper creduntur, et numquam intelliguntur, sicut est omnis temporalia et humana gesta percurrens.*”<sup>63</sup> Some knowledge must simply be believed without rational verification. This

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<sup>57</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” in Michael Kessler, Wolfhart Pannenberg, und Herrmann Josef Pottmeyer, eds., *Fides quaerens intellectum. Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie, FS for Max Seckler*, (Tübingen: Francke, 1992), pp. 533-544.

<sup>58</sup> Here he references especially Klaus Kienzler, *Glauben und Denken bei Anselm von Canterbury* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1981), pp. 59-65. Ingo U. Dalferth, “Fides Quaerens Intellectum,” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984), pp. 54-105.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*.

<sup>60</sup> “Anselm hat die Forderung nach einem rein rationalen Verfahren in der theologischen Argumentation ganz radikal gemeint und zur Anwendung gebracht. Der Glaube wird zwar als ‘Erfahrungsfundament’ der Theologie vorausgesetzt, nicht aber als Prinzip der Argumentation.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 535.

<sup>61</sup> “Die metaphysische Verfassung der Vernunft ist nicht als Prämisse des methodischen Verfahrens *sola ratione* mitzuverstehen. Sie macht aber verständlich, daß Anselm das Zutrauen haben konnte, daß Vernunftgründe der Wahrheit Gottes letztlich nicht widerstreiten können, sondern im ‘Nachdenken der sich zeigenden Sache’ zur Einsicht in die Offenbarungswahrheit führen müssen” (Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 535).

<sup>62</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 535.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *De diversis Questionibus ad Simplicianum*. Q. 48, PL 40, 31 (“Different are always matters believed and ever understood as all temporal things and human affairs run.”), referenced in Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 536.

includes the incarnation of the divine Logos. However, Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* goes well beyond these delimitations Augustine had established, and intends proving the incarnation, death of Jesus, and redemption of humankind. Similarly, in the *Monologion* the Blessed Trinity is deduced from rational considerations. Pannenberg wonders whether Anselm had something akin to the Hegelian “*Aufhebung der [religiösen] Vorstellung in den [philosophischen] Begriff*” in mind—the cancelling out of [religious] imagination in the [philosophical] term<sup>64</sup>—but immediately denies it. This tangent, however, does reveal Pannenberg’s approach to the issue.<sup>65</sup>

He notes that Anselm grants his thoughts need improvement. For Anselm rational verification of the contents of faith serves the believer in delighting in the Christian faith: “*ut eorum quae credunt intellectu et contemplatione delectentur*.”<sup>66</sup> Pannenberg wonders whether this may be seen as anticipating Nicholas de Cusa’s teaching on the synthetic power of conjecture (cf. *coincidentia oppositorum*, which for Nicholas de Cusa only occurs in God)., He admits that for Anselm (not knowing the term “*Wissenschaft*” yet) all rationality was undergirded and sustained implicitly by faith, but not by principles. However, he sees as anticipating a 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding of “*Wissenschaftlichkeit*.” Appropriating Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas will argue from principles of faith, thus rendering theology *scientia subalternata*.<sup>67</sup> Now theology as a science of conclusions becomes possible. For both Anselm and Thomas, *credere* seeks *intelligere*. Thomas merely introduces more nuance. Reason has the competence to conclude articles of faith, gain insight into acts of faith and content of faith. Thus, what Thomas describes as the function of the *intellectus fidei*, remains to Anselm simply the undifferentiated *intelligere*. While, indeed Thomas could develop a *praeambula fidei* and a *sacra doctrina*, unfolding logically and without ruptures everything from the perspective of God, Pannenberg registers a surprising parallel to Anselm’s *sola ratione*.<sup>68</sup> This includes—perhaps *prima facie* unexpectedly—Thomas’ agreement with Anselm’s programmatic *fides quaerens intellectum*. Both are *d’accord* that divine truth and its *rationes* infinitely exceed any rational, theological “reconstruction” of these.<sup>69</sup>

These similarities notwithstanding, the *rationes necessariae* of Anselm as regards to typological congruencies between the Old and New Testaments are different from Thomas’s decidedly more scientific perspective. The revalorization of Scripture for theology during and after the Reformation occasions now, in Pannenberg’s estimation, “a reconstruction” of the creedal contents, not from “a general idea of God” (*aus einem allgemeinen Gottesgedanken*) as first cause, but “as explication of the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ. . . .”<sup>70</sup> On the basis of the 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 536. Cf. Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie. Vorlesungsmanuskripte zur Philosophie der Natur und des Geistes von 1805-1806*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, in *Philosophische Beiträge* 67 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1967), p. 272.

<sup>65</sup> For a more extensive discussion, cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theologie und Philosophie: ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* I, 1. Cf. Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 537.

<sup>67</sup> Here he does not quote Thomas Aquinas directly, but rather Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1957), pp. 71-85. Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 537, fn. 18. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 541.

<sup>68</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 539.

<sup>69</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 540.

<sup>70</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 543.

century German term “*Wissenschaftlichkeit*,” he must part ways with Anselm and Thomas. These creedal tenets now need to stand the test at the court of the critical-historical exegesis of Scripture. One should add empirical data. These developments call for relativizing Anselm’s and Thomas’ understanding of theology. While one should not take exception to the Medieval approach which thinks “the world and man from and determined by God,” now “the methodological access is a different one if the rational reconstruction of the creedal contents is developed as an [ongoing] explication of the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>71</sup> In the conclusion to this essay he notes the difference between “the present of faith and God’s future and his glory,”<sup>72</sup> as Paul had expressed it: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13: 12).

## Conclusion

Contrary to Anselm and, in fact surprisingly analogous to the Second Vatican council (cf. *Dei Verbum* 2), revelation, to Pannenberg’s mind, is neither static nor settled once and for all times, but is dynamic and somehow ongoing in history, as the question of God needs to be answered by every individual on his own. Already in 1955, he acknowledges an epistemological hiatus between medieval and modern thinking as regards the term analogy.<sup>73</sup> In the final analysis, Pannenberg appropriates Anselmian thought within the parameters German philosophy established. That the tripersonal God and the human person “encounter” in human cognition as persons—this Anselm assumes and Pannenberg ignores.

Pannenberg is not to be categorized simply as pursuing “a Christology from below.”<sup>74</sup> He opposed subjectivism in the pejorative sense in matters theological. But he does take exception to a noetic Christology from above as practiced by Anselm. Maybe this explains why he could not embrace Mariology as Anselm did?<sup>75</sup> Yet, can the mystery of the incarnation be unlocked without the figure of Mary—as Anselm would deny? Pannenburg rightly laments Anselm’s almost exclusive focus on satisfaction and disregard for deification. However, what does deification mean for Pannenberg *in concreto*? Is not Mary the prime exemplar of *Theosis*? Anselm’s mind is prayerful and possesses its dynamics from a personal relationship to God.

The great limitation of Pannenberg’s approach is his system-building project, that is indebted to German Idealism of the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is a lens wholly foreign to both Scripture and Anselm. There is a paradox: while Pannenberg calls into question much of German Protestant theology, he also stands firmly in that tradition. With Root one must acknowledge that this great intellectual Protestant tradition, represented by such Protestant

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<sup>71</sup> “Es ist andererseits nichts daran auszusetzen, daß die mittelalterlichen Theologen Welt und Mensch von Gott her, nämlich als durch Gott bestimmt, in den Blick nahmen. Nur der methodische Zugang ist ein anderer, wenn die rationale Rekonstruktion des Glaubensinhalts als Explikation der geschichtlichen Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus entwickelt wird” (Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 543).

<sup>72</sup> Pannenberg, “Die Rationalität der Theologie,” p. 544.

<sup>73</sup> Pannenberg, *Analogie und Offenbarung*, 1955.

<sup>74</sup> Bradshaw, *Pannenberg: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 68f.

<sup>75</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, pp. 141-150.

luminaries as Schleiermacher, via Hegel, Ritschl, Harnack, and Bultmann, is exhausted.<sup>76</sup> Certainly, Pannenberg does not intend to reduce God to one actor among numerous in history; but is he able to demonstrate how God stands above history and, nevertheless, is history's goal, and affirm in this ductus the singularity of the incarnation? While appropriating approvingly much of what the monk of Bec had written, he appreciates the Anselmian genius with the eyes of Hegel. However, the contexts of Anselm and Pannenberg are not fully congruent: a thoroughly monastic, ecclesial and sacramental milieu over and against a philosophical and historical perspective. Though Pannenberg appreciates in Anselm someone who does not subscribe to a disjunctive *aut . . . aut* when it comes to faith and reason, can Hegel's noetic, ideational approach supply an adequate, unassailable basis for God's divinity? Barth's style in the *Church Dogmatics* is by design proclamatory; Anselm's is prayerful and meditative. The existential, personal dimensions of faith are not part of a theological epistemology for Pannenberg. Strangely, Pannenberg is in a sense more scholastic than Anselm is "prescholastic" – to use Grabmann's predication.<sup>77</sup> And yet, Pannenberg stands firmly on the ground of Christian orthodoxy in many regards and distances himself from recent tendencies in German Protestant thought.

A virtuoso of Christian intellectual history, the tragedy of Pannenberg is to be too much fascinated by Hegelian Idealism. True, God is the sovereign subject of history, but not the object exhausted by an investigation *in* history. For this reason, in contrast to Hegel, this Lutheran theologian postpones the full revelation of God to the end of history.<sup>78</sup> "Jesus' resurrection is an event which is 'out-of-place' as far as the present is concerned; and yet, it is strictly a historical event. It is an event which intrudes into the present from what can only be understood as the future where universal history is consummated."<sup>79</sup> This perspective is wholly alien to Anselm. The notion of development *in* history, as advanced by Hegel, is unfamiliar to the Medieval mind.

There is no gainsaying that Pannenberg does accept the Medieval idea of an *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, yet his concept of truth seems limited to history.<sup>80</sup> Is God—much like the *nous* of Aristotle—but the final product of human cogitation? Does God ultimately mutate into a contingent entity in an immanent ontology?<sup>81</sup> Pannenberg does not robustly prevent such an interpretation. Or does Pannenberg sufficiently preserve God's aseity apart from the categories of time, space, and thinking? Did perhaps even the Anselmian *id quo maius cogitari nequit* delude, deceive Pannenberg? The Anselmian principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* is ignored in order to provide theology a philosophical perspective. Surprisingly reminiscent of Meister Eckhart (ca.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Root, "The Achievement of Wolfhart Pannenberg," in *First Things*, March 2012, pp. 1-13, at 7, accessed <https://firstthings.com/article/2012/03/the-achievement-of-wolfhart-pannenberg> accessed March 12, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956), pp. 258-339, at pp. 258f.

<sup>78</sup> Don H. Olive, *Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), p. 100. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 60 (1963), pp. 90-121. Hegel was unable to countenance in Jesus the eschatological message.

<sup>79</sup> Olive, *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, p. 102.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Christoph Gimpel, *Gottesgedanke und autonome Vernunft, eine kritisch-konstruktive Auseinandersetzung mit den philosophischen Grundlagen der Theologie Wolfhart Pannenburgs* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2007), p. 59.

<sup>81</sup> Heimo Hofmeister, *Philosophisch denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), pp. 100-103.

1260-ca. 1328) and John Tauler (+ 1361), but especially of the alternately pantheist or dualist sounding Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), Pannenberg is erudite, objective and at times sapiential, but conspicuously impersonal—despite his personal conversion experience. This is a frappant paradox in Pannenberg's grand design. The subjective, personal and prayerful dimensions of Anselm's attitude as expressed throughout in his writings, go unthematized. If Pannenberg accepts analogical language, then this seems to be done from an Idealist perspective, rather than from a correlation of nature and supernatural grace—which is Anselm's subcutaneous *point d'appui*. Faith and theology seem subject to revision as *Wissenschaftlichkeit* becomes the ultimate yardstick for religious truth. Here an inability to affirm the binding nature of the conciliar process as organic expressions of God's definitive revelation in Christ Jesus comes into prominent focus. Pannenberg does not do justice to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church since Pentecost. Pannenberg's sweeping new calibration of theology, however, does not beguile or deceive him: he does justice to individual contributions to Christian intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*), though they may be diametrically opposed to his own position. His reading is not as subjective as, for instance, Karl Barth's, who forced Anselm's method into his program of orthodoxy. Admittedly, Pannenberg expresses the anthropocentric shift, but it is not personalist. The whole in a fragment—"das Ganze im Fragment."<sup>82</sup> This is famously the program of Joseph Ratzinger. Pannenberg sets different accents. His disciplined system seems to disregard the, at times, irresolvably aporetic nature of human cognition. This deprives him of an openness for the drama of the failure and sin of the human mind, for the unveiling and yet ever-greater veiling of the divine mystery in this inextricably contingent world and, *a fortiori*, for the pain of rejecting grace.

Pannenberg did not problematize the term "ontological argument" for other reasons than Descartes. To Pannenberg's mind systematic cognition, as pursued by Anselm, traces human subjectivity back to an indwelling relationality between the human person, God, and world. To both Anselm and Pannenberg, God is the origin of "the Ontological Argument." German Idealism intensifies this insight—yet without dwelling on the I-Thou dimension of Christian faith. Finitude for Idealism is incapable of thinking the finite as finite without the unconditioned. This is Pannenberg's point of agreement with Anselm.<sup>83</sup> The proof of God's existence is the self-proof of God!<sup>84</sup> Pannenberg sees this expressed somehow in the *Proslogion* and *Monologion* with surprising clarity for the early Middle Ages. Christian theism bears this fact out in a way in which no other religion can possibly succeed. And Christianity succeeds so very well therein as it is divine revelation *in* history. The human being is now capable of "a knowing self-relationality." This invariably leads to query for the ground, origin and destiny of human existence and the world—and most importantly for why the human person is subject in such a heightened awareness. The act of self-ascertaining such subjectivity transcends this subjectivity. Such cognition reveals

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<sup>82</sup> Thus the title of Ratzinger's eulogy on Gottlieb Söhngen, his teacher and dissertation director in Munich (1892-1971): Joseph Ratzinger, "Das Ganze im Fragment: Gottlieb Söhngen zum Gedächtnis," in *Christ in Gegenwart* 23 (1971), p. 399.

<sup>83</sup> Klaus Vechtel, *Trinität und Zukunft. Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie und Trinitätstheologie im Denken Wolfhart Pannberg* (Frankfurt a. M.: Knecht, 2001), p. 99.

<sup>84</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis Macdonagh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), p. 300.

a relationship between the infinite origin of finite human cognition and the finite human person. The monk Anselm was seeking God's face; Pannenberg rehabilitates God vis-à-vis positivism.

Ultimately, such an awareness of intersubjectivity does not self-generate, but is mindful of being granted, gifted by God, to think God, the world, and the self. This explains Pannenberg's interest in nature and the cosmos. There is a sense of gratitude pervading religious thinking that prevents it from falling into either existential doubt or fleeting delight in the merely trivial. In agreement with his Munich colleagues from the department of philosophy—Henrich and the Plotinus expert Werner Beierwaltes (1931-)<sup>85</sup>—he sees Anselm pointing to this *datum*. The unconditioned ultimate is only to be grasped in cognition. Significantly, this ultimate is related to *human* thoughts.

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<sup>85</sup> See especially the following titles: Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis. Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960); and Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1972).