

Introduction

CONVICTED:
DOCTRINAL SYNOPSES

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As a means in which to find greater understanding in underlying truths—summarizing what's available biblically, as well as historically and philosophically, **the systematic method of theology**¹ presents itself quintessentially for surveying particular doctrines, themes, and topics appertaining to Christendom. And while its Achilles heel lay in its attempt to coalesce and cohere paradoxes which may simply exist as such mystery, *it is this very crux which also works to its benefit* by recognizing and remaining aware of relationships existing between doctrines and truths. Thus, while the Doctrines of the Trinity, of Imago Dei, of God's revelation, and of Scriptural inspiration/authority/purpose, may appear at first glance to be distinct from one another, upon further hermeneutical study and research vast doctrinal connectives and implications reveal themselves.

Thus, through synoptical exposition of key doctrinal topics belonging particularly (though—not all exclusively) to Christendom; through identification of critical Scriptural passages; by review and summary of interpretations and perspectives of three different theologians (namely—Paul S. Jewett, Karl Barth, and Wolfhart Pannenberg); and ultimately, admission of a conclusive (yet perhaps not *concluding*²) summary of my own perspectives and beliefs about each doctrinal topic; formative doctrinal connections and holistic theological conclusions will not only be presented, but will aide in the further shaping of those personal and not yet concluding perspectives and beliefs.

¹That is, in differentiation of other Theological “studies” as expressed by Erickson in “Christian Theology.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1998), 24-31. Rf. “*Figure 1*,” 24.

²The difference being that while I may be quite resolute and expressive about my perspectives and beliefs particular to the given doctrinal topics, that *by no means* denotes that those perspectives and beliefs have reached a finality in respect to their clarity, their exposition, and their absolute comprehension.

On The Trinity

Scripture

The moment we begin approaching the particularly (and *exclusive*) Christian³ doctrine of the Trinity we are confounded to the complicated task of giving proper account for unmistakable paradox (how 1+1+1=1, rather than 3). And indeed, to observe scripture is to witness paradox without succinct explanation (Compare *Deut. 6:4* to *2 Cor. 13:14*). While the Old Testament (OT) is riddled with passages emphasizing the unity and oneness of God (*Deut. 6:4*; *Exod. 20:3*; *1 Kings 8:60*; throughout the book of *Isaiah*; *Mal. 2:10*), so seems to be the case that the New Testament (NT) contains passages affirming the Oneness of God as well (*John 10:30*; *1 Cor. 8:4*; *Gal. 3:20*; *Eph. 4:4-6*; *1 Thes. 1:9*; *1 Tim. 2:5*), the reality remains that “the first Christians were Jews who worshiped and served the God of the Jews [*the God of the OT*], the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the only one true and living God whose name was Yahweh (Lord).”⁴ (Italics mine) How could they do both since devotion to the Oneness of God seems to suggest an idolatry by the devotion to the other (Jesus)? The only means of explanation is that these Jewish followers of Jesus adhered to both the belief that God *is one, yet He is also three-in-one*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

³Unique in the Abrahamic religions which adhere to faith in the “God of Abraham,” thus being foundationally monotheistic in belief and practice.

⁴Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 261.

Theological Standpoints

“**The doctrine of the Trinity has been called the *arche*[sic], that is, the first principle, of Christian theology.** There is much, it would seem, to corroborate this judgment.”⁵ (Emphasis added) Paul Jewett expression is the running theme amongst all three theologians⁶. Through his discourse, Jewett outlines that by being one substance, each triune of the trinity “subsists” as an aspect of the whole—much like white “subsists” in snow.⁷ He holds that the substance of the three divine persons to be love—in which purpose is not merely *to* love, being that God is love, nor merely to *express* love, that is, express God, but rather, that the purpose itself, the intention and function itself *is* love, which is to say: is God. Ultimately, while Jewett makes known that his understanding of the trinity is a clarification of the core theological doctrine of Christianity, he resigns himself to acknowledging that at best, the human condition concedes to the use of “broken analogies” for explanations of the mysteries of Christendom; concluding that—in the end, “*the dogma of the Trinity is not intended to eliminate the divine mystery, but to preserve it.*”⁸ (Italics his)

While Jewett is accepting of the use of “broken analogies”--making the clear point that while we use them, we worship (and consequently, **know through intimate relationship**) the God represented by yet completely our meager attempts of explanation; Karl Barth however fervently dismissed any attempt made by humanity to understand God. For Barth—who vehemently did

⁵Ibid, 263.

⁶Indeed Jewett makes clear his tutelage and shadowing of Karl Barth—taking hints and theological standpoints from Barth himself, who takes the doctrine of the trinity to answer the question: “Who is God?” which he decidedly affirms to be *the* chief question of theology; before those of what God is, whether God exists, and how we may know God.

⁷Ibid, 285. “As snow would not be snow apart from whiteness, so this particular whiteness of which we speak when we say that snow is white would not be whiteness apart from snow. So it is with the divine persons; they do not exist independently, but rather subsist mutually, in the Godhead.”

⁸Ibid, 303.

not wish to portray God as something “we” (humanity) could make, God is so completely different to us that there's no way we can even imagine Him unless he reveals Himself first. It is directly *in* God's self-revelation to us that the framework for his model of the Trinity derives; yet so much more, his doctrinal statements on how God creates, how He interacts with His creation, Scripture, and the role of man are formulated.

To Barth, God is hidden, with no witness of Him in anything save for His revelation.⁹ Yet there is no sense of 'detachment' as has been conveyed by much of Barth's critics. Rather, Barth speaks of Christendom as an intimate person to person relationship between Man and God. *The first word of communication in this relationship is*, however, from God.¹⁰ God's act of revelation is not three “persons” as was common practice to define, but to Barth “**the God who reveals Himself** according to Scripture **is One in three distinctive modes of being (*Seinweise*)** subsisting in their mutual relations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹¹(Emphasis mine) Barth describes each mode of God as the One God, with three descriptors.¹² Thus, according to Barth, the models of the Trinity prevalent at the time: the *Immanent Trinity* (God as God outside of creation; God in “Godself”), and the *Economic Trinity* (The triune of God is merely a manifestation of His interaction with creation; that is, God for Us), were not distinct and separate, but one and the same.

⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol 1, 315-324; for Barth's discussion of God's hiddenness, and especially part 2, pp. 320-324, including the excursus of pp. 322-4.

¹⁰This will be elaborated on later, for as was said, God's revelation is not only the starting point of Barth's theology, but truly it's very core. For now, it can simply be stated that to Barth, God is not something that we posit as an answer to our human problems, or some kind of wish fulfillment. Humans cannot ‘reach’ God or grasp him or say anything about him from our own vantage point by itself.

¹¹Ibid, Vol. 1, 348.

¹²Ibid, Vol. 1.

“**The one God reveals Himself** according to Scripture as the Creator,”...“**He is** God our Father”(384); “**The one God reveals Himself** according to Scripture as the Reconciler, i.e., as the Lord in the midst of our enmity towards Him.”...“**He is** the Son of God”(399); “**The one God reveals Himself** according to Scripture as the Redeemer, i.e., as the Lord who sets us free.”...“**He is** the Holy Spirit”(448).

Wolfhart Pannenberg echoed the similar tone of Barth and Jewett, claiming that all theology is but the doctrine of God, and therefore the doctrine of the Trinity is the heart of all Christian theology. Much in the tier of Karl Barth, Pannenberg—who studied under Barth for a term and had read through the entirety of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Pannenberg held that there is no way of arriving at certainty about God before the eschatological demonstration of God's glory in all things.¹³ Contrary to Barth's revelation theory, Pannenberg felt that the reality of God is only given in and with other things;¹⁴ it is “co-given to experience in other objects,” and is therefore “accessible to theological reflection not directly but only indirectly.”¹⁵ As such, his theory of the trinity is developed incongruously to the tradition. He begins with the threeness of God, then endeavors to account for the unity of God by expressing each facet of the triune as expressive of one particular concept: that of “Lordship.”¹⁶ He then uses the Trinity to expound on defining the Lordship of God, and its expression through each facet. In this way, Pannenberg hoped to offers biblical warrant for the equality, mutual reciprocity, and dependence of each of the three persons on the others.¹⁷ Lastly, like Barth he ties the doctrine of the Trinity to

¹³“The knowledge of Christian theology is always partial in comparison to the definitive revelation of God in the future of His kingdom (1 Cor. 13:12)” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 55.

¹⁴This lay specifically in the revelation of Jesus Christ; and ultimately, the Cross.

¹⁵Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1977), 87.

¹⁶Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 312.

¹⁷*Ibid*, See page citations in parentheses following each quotation.

While Pannenberg gives weight to the insight of Athanasius: “The Father cannot be thought of as Father without the Son. This was his decisive argument for the full deity of the Son”(279), he he wonders whether there might not be a sense in which the deity of the Father must also be dependent on his relation to the Son, thus insuring a basis for “true reciprocity in the trinitarian relations”(312). This, he asserts, is found in the concept of Lordship.

“The Son is not merely the representative of the rule of God; he executes it. He is the holder of lordship. By his exaltation, the Risen Lord has been put in a position of rule” (312).

“As Jesus glorifies the Father and not himself?...“so the Spirit glorifies not himself but the Son, and in him the Father. Precisely by not speaking of himself (John 16:13) but bearing witness to Jesus (15:26) and reminding us of his teaching (14:26), he shows himself to be the Spirit of truth (16:13). Distinct from the Father and the Son, he thus belongs to both” (315).

revelation. Yet in contrast to Barth, he develops the doctrine of the Trinity by reference to the concrete history of salvation recorded in Scripture, rather than basing it on a “formal principle” of one God who reveals Himself in three ways. That is—what Pannenberg ultimately employs with the term “essence” to convey the relationship with between the triune nature of God, is expressed solely and wholly through the salvation and reconciliation history of God; a history encompassing the gospel and truly all of Scripture, but also manifest in all that God does as leading to Salvation by the subjection of ALL THINGS to the Father, by the Son, testified by the Spirit.¹⁸

Conviction

In a sense, the mystery of the Trinity either demands a thorough study seeking a genuine understanding of that which may be already faithfully accepted, or a purposeful ignorance so as not to be bombarded by mental strife which may possibly garnish the fear of hinderance to faithful response. All three theologians recognize that the discourse isn't easy, nor is the “resolution” of sorts that leaves you with some sort understanding. Paul said in 1 Corinthians that for now we see in a mirror a riddle; speaking just prior that any knowledge (attained) will be rendered inoperative when the telios comes. For it is merely a partial, and there will be no need for “partials” when the fullness has been made complete. I find myself hoping in that “telios,” and in a time which—as is characterized by Pannenberg's theology, the Eschaton comes to be the reality, rather than just the waking reality we catch glimpses of in our dream state, as those who have “come to know” Jesus (as John describes in his epistle) understand it to be. Until such time, I continue to seek and to know that which knows me, in whatever manner I may be led.

¹⁸Ibid, 324.

Particular of the doctrine of the Trinity, I've found that through analogous relation (akin to the likes of explanations by the Doctor, in *Doctor Who*) to the book *Flatland*¹⁹, the Trinity can come to be understood imagining a three dimensional cone interacting with a two dimensional space: entering in by its point it looks as if it's one, entering in on its side its three, and on its circle seems to encompass everything in its entirety.

Except it's nothing like that.

On Imago Dei

Scripture

Stemming directly from the doctrine of the Trinity—which answers the question “who is God?”²⁰ comes the doctrine of *Imago Dei*: being created in the image of God, and with it, seek to answer how man relates to God, specifically in regards to his image. Critical then, to this doctrine are is the initial creation passage in Genesis 1:26-28. And while there are a number of particular texts which seem to lend themselves to study and exposition of this doctrine²¹—and which will indeed be used in reference through theological discourse, it's through particular passages, and an understanding of the central words of the Genesis passage, that mark a unique and essential perspective in which to better understand the doctrine. Psalm 8 deals with the glory of the Lord through the creation and *position among creation* of Man. Colossians 1:15 not only outlines Jesus to be the very image of God, but also a cosmological outline of that image, Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 concerns the creation of the physical, earthly body itself as created.

¹⁹Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: a Romance of Many Dimensions* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992).

²⁰Rf. footnote 6 on page 3.

²¹Rf. Gen. 5:1; Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 11:7, 2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10

Genesis 1:26-27, and 2:7-8 corresponding to the doctrine. Lastly, critical review must be given to the word choice used by the author of the Genesis passages. First to note, the author uses plural pronouns three times: “us” once and “our” twice. Next, the author uses different words in the description of the creation of man: in verse 26, “make” (הַעֲשֶׂה), in verse 27, “create” (בָּרָא), and in chapter 2, “form” (יָצַר). These distinctions make up critical variations which—in effect, dictate that which is posited as doctrine.

Theological Standpoints

Jewett's discourse is wholly enveloped in the understanding that being made in the image of God is to exist

“imprinted by the Creator with those endowments that enable us to transcend the world of lesser creatures and live our lives in a unique I-Thou (the human self as a subject—an “I” who responds in freedom to the address of the divine “Thou”) relationship with God and neighbor.”^{22 23}

It is through this understanding that he formulates his discourse, placing importance on working from creation to redemption, rather than standard framework of the opposite. This is based on his understanding of two issues: 1) The theologian cannot declare what is lost by sin nature (and consequently, what Jesus redeemed) if there is an inability to know what the Creator initially bestowed;²⁴ 2) though we are God “breathed,” we began as dust, thus emphasizing the importance of *progression* in deliberation, not regression.²⁵ Jewett began with addressing the

²²Paul K. Jewett, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: a Neo-Evangelical Theology*, ed. Mrs. Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 62.

²³The “I-Thou” relationship is characteristic of Karl Barth, who—discussed later, seemed to influence Jewett greatly. For Barth, the “I-Thou” relationship was not only present in the Creator, but then shaped humanity's creation *Imago Dei* (*relationally*).

²⁴*Ibid*, 60.

²⁵*Ibid*, 29.

beauty found in the dignity of what it means to be created in God's image.²⁶ He covered how the problem of the fall relates to Imago Dei, concluding that humanity—though fallen, still display the beauty of the Creator, though corrupted by sin.²⁷ These endowments are what allow fallen man to transcend the self, responding to the Spirit to will and to form the nature (imago dei) begun at creation. These characteristics are reason, memory, and humor.²⁸ Jewett conclusion lay in that in Heaven—through Christ, the “restored” image will exceed that of any example of the image “lost.” It is through Christ as the image of God that He works to restore the image, quoting Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:49.²⁹

While Jewett based much of his discourse from his agreement with John Calvin's attentive focus, Barth did not hold that the doctrine of Imago Dei regarded the image of God as something *in* humanity—as Calvin did, but rather that the image of God lay in man's relationship to God and other humans.. He reasoned that people were created as men and women whose purpose is to be in communion with one another as the Trinitarian Godhead is with each other, and centers his position on Genesis 1:27 where it states that God created people in His image “male and female He created them.” He posited that it is in the description of “male and female,” where the explanation of what image is.³⁰ He does not hold that the image of God in people is like a mirror as Calvin does, and therefore rejects the claim that the logical

²⁶Ibid, 28-29. God took council with himself before creating man; while God created *all* (all creation is God “breathed), he specifically engaged in the act of “forming” (yatsar , which when used throughout Scripture, is connoted to the familiar role of the potter; yet of more significance, it announces purpose.), meeting earth (dust) in intimacy and shaping it, and imparting His breath directly; He made special provision for the man and the woman, providing food, planting a garden, and placing them in dominion.

²⁷Ibid, 58-59.

²⁸Rf. discourse within part 2: THE MEANING OF THE IMAGE AS GIVEN IN CREATION: HUMAN SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, pp. 59-89.

²⁹“*Just as we have born the image of the earthly, we will also bear he image of the heavenly.*”

³⁰Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol 3, 200-235.

consequence of his assertion leads one to conclude that God has gender. Thus, putting stress on the relation between both the male and the female—calling it that core of humanity's creation being a creature of “encounter.”³¹ It is the sharing of “encounter” between one another and with God that humans engage the “I-Thou” relationship,³² that they are truly engaging in the Imago Dei of the Trinity. The better the human relationship, the more closely they reflect the members of the Trinity.

Following Barth, Pannenberg seems to concern himself less with the question, “What is the image of God in which we are made, and presently exist in a fallen state?” and more focus on asking, “What does it mean to be made in the image of God—a state which we *will enter* with fellowship in God?” Pannenberg proposes that we abandon the idea of the fall and regard the Imago Dei not as something we have marred but as a destiny toward which we are to move. This does not absolve us of responsibility, for we do have the capacity to respond to our destiny.³³ With his Eschaton theology laid out, he stresses that our destiny is “fellowship with God on the basis of our creation in the divine image.”³⁴ Our creation in God's image means that, “from the very first as God's creatures we are destined for fellowship with God, for 'life with God'. The point of likeness to God is fellowship with him.”³⁵

Conviction

³¹Ibid, 203.

³²Of which Jewett relies on.

³³Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 227.

³⁴Ibid, 227.

³⁵Ibid, 230.

The uniqueness of Imago Dei rest in the allegation that humanity was at once fully “good,” yet somehow managed to “fall” from this place of “completion.” This perception, I feel, then shapes the very core of our belief as to who God is. While many theologians (Barth here referred) held that the doctrine of the Trinity answers the question “who is God?”³⁶, irrevocably, it's our resolution on the creation of Man which delegates how we answer that question. From how we answer this, more questions arise requiring explanation and deliberation, which then seems to craft doctrines of faith solely posited in order that the beginning doctrine remain intact. So to give my doctrine of Imago Dei, I must first confess to my belief that Genesis 1:1-2:3 was written by someone different than Moses. My belief lay in Scriptural understanding of authorship,³⁷ rooted itself in my doctrine of Scripture.³⁸ To me, this distinction concedes the position that perhaps the first account is a broad portrait of God “creating” from beginning to end. This being the case allows for a scientific affirmation posited by Dr. Gerald Schroeder that from the viewpoint of the “Creator”--that is the center of Creation, we (the universe in its entirety) is and has been in the “6th Day” of creation; from its beginning and epicenter until now and here, has been 6 days.³⁹ This easily aligns (without an in depth exposition) with Christ's

³⁶Rf. footnotes, 3.

³⁷There are 3 factors which attest to a recognizable difference between the first part of Genesis, and that which I adhere to Moses writing (being the rest of the Pentateuch). Firstly, and most generally, is purpose. There seems to be a distinct difference in purpose between the first creation narrative and the second (and consequently, the rest of Genesis). Within this lay stylistic differences particular to that of Moses yet significantly absent from the first creation narrative. Moses was prone to insert codes of Law which are given far later in the narrative. This would agree with an understanding of one who was in constant communion with God (namely, Moses), being given the Law first, then instructed to write. It is clear that if this was the order, then Moses would conceivably be reminded of that which he was shown first in and through the history revealed for him to record. Lastly, as part of this notion of Communion with God, Moses was first given God's name—it was he who first knew God as Yahweh, which would then affirm a continual use and reference to Yahweh-God in giving an account. The author of the first creation narrative only refers to God as Elohim; a proper name no doubt, but not one which embodies a fellowship to the personal Yahweh, of which from Genesis 2:4 on God is referred to.

³⁸This will be expounded in my conviction stated at the end of the Scriptural Inspiration section, rf.

³⁹Gerald Schroeder “The Age of the Universe,” geraldshroeder.com, <http://www.geraldshroeder.com/AgeUniverse.aspx> (accessed November 17, 2012).

words in John 5:17.⁴⁰ If we are indeed in the Scriptural “6th day” of Creation, that would mean that God is currently, *actively* “making” humanity in His image. He indeed did *create* man and woman, actively and purposefully *forming* them, but man has yet to be fully *made* in God's image and likeness. Thus, I believe—similar to Pannenberg, there will come a time when we indeed enter the 7th day (certainly the reconciliation of the Cross can be understood as the dawn—that time in between the 6th and 7th day, bringing the former into the later) when we are “made” (whole) Imago Dei, but for now, God is at work through His spoken Word—Jesus the Son, the very means of creation, “**making** *all things* new.”⁴¹

On God's Transcendence

Scripture

The standing differentiation of God's interaction with His creation lay between whether God is Immanent (present in all things, both mundane and dramatic) or Transcendent (wholly other in a sense that He is separate from His creation). There are Biblical texts which support both views. Most prominent defining God's immanence, would be Acts 17:24-29, further expounded by Paul in description of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20. God's Immanence can be cultural: Jeremiah 23:24, Acts 17:27-28, Psalm 104:29-30; supernatural in manifestation: 1 Peter 4:11, 1 Corinthians 14:1, various Acts texts (9:4-6,10-16; 10:9-16; 13:2); and ultimately in the dramatic example of the incarnation: John 1:14, Philippians 2:6, Colossians 1:17. Yet His Transcendence seems to be quite understood through texts such as Isaiah 55:8-9, 6:1-5, Psalm

⁴⁰“But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” Meaning that the 7th day of “rest” may not have occurred yet.

⁴¹Rf. Rev. 21:5.

113:5-6, and John 8:23. Whichever the case, one of the great mysteries of God is that He can be so different yet relate to each of His creation in a personal way.

Theological Standpoints

Beginning with Barth—who, unmistakably has revealed to be the sort of gravitational hub of both Pannenberg and Jewett (being whom they base their theology, then expand on it), reveals his whole doctrine in establishing an “otherness” of God. In reaction to his liberal contemporaries, Barth conveyed God with an infinite qualitative distinction to man; all modern ideas of immanence are thus set aside by this emphasis on God’s transcendence. “The power of God can be detected neither in the world of nature nor in the souls of men. It must not be confounded with any high, exalted, force, known or knowable.”⁴² It is by making God utterly “other” that Barth understands our relationship to Him being solely based on His revelation to us, claiming that God being transcendent, is God being hidden. He makes it explicit that God is the unknowable and indescribable God; the hidden God who remains hidden.

Pannenberg serves to expand on Barth's transcendence with a more scientific, metaphysical understanding. To Pannenberg, God's transcendence is understood as—truly, the “Divine Infinite.” Divine transcendence involves not only the fact that God is distinct from finite reality, but also that God transcends the distinction between the infinite and the finite: it is precisely in his immanence that God proves himself to be transcendent.⁴³ This affects the

⁴²Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1968), 36.

⁴³Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 400.

understanding of God's holiness⁴⁴, to the incarnation in Christ.⁴⁵ As such, God's transcendence is at once simple as it is a paradox. He is wholly separate from creation in that He *is not creation*, yet without *God's Being*, there would be no creative *being* (existence), so He is immanent in all things, as sustaining as things.⁴⁶

Of all three, Jewett is satisfied with the paradox of a God who is at once both immanent and transcendent, rather than attempting to explain, and validate scientifically either an understanding of one or the other, or a systematic approach to coalesce the two together. Jewett aligns himself with the authors of Scripture, positing that truly, they're not in the least bothered by the paradox their God is distinguished from all creation by an infinite, qualitative difference, yet *never remote from that creation*, instead present *everywhere to it*.⁴⁷

Accordingly, he concludes, that

“Every sentence in the Bible and in dogmatics assumes this divine transcendence. At the same time he is “the Holy One in our midst.” Every sentence in the Bible and in dogmatics assumes this divine immanence.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴“The concept of the Infinite links up especially with that of the holiness of God, for the basic meaning of holiness is separateness from everything profane.” Ibid, 397-398.
 “Thus the holiness of God both opposes the profane world and embraces it, bringing it into fellowship with the holy God. We see here a structural affinity between what the Bible says about the holiness of God and the concept of the true Infinite. The Infinite that is merely a negation of the finite is not yet truly seen as the Infinite (as Hegel showed), for it is defined by delimitation from something else, i.e., the finite. Viewed in this way the infinite is something in distinction from something else, and it is thus finite. The Infinite is truly infinite only when it transcends its own antithesis to the finite. In this sense the holiness of God is truly infinite, for it is opposed to the profane, yet it also enters the profane world, penetrates it, and makes it holy. In the renewed world that is the target of eschatological hope the difference between God and creature will remain, but that between the holy and the profane will be totally abolished (Zech. 14.20-21).” Ibid, 399-400.

⁴⁵“The incarnation could add nothing to God. It seemed totally absurd to Athanasius to ascribe becoming to God. Even in his physical appearing the Son undergoes no change. In the view of Athanasius the biblical statements about God's faithfulness bear witness to his immutability.” Ibid, 437. Further, in Volume 2, Pannenberg describes the Incarnation as “God's self actualization in the world.” Volume 2, 319.

⁴⁶Rf. Col. 1

⁴⁷Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 218.

⁴⁸Ibid, 218.

Conviction

Of the doctrine of God's transcendence, I found myself for the first time confronted with a study of doctrine which I had not put much thought into prior. In study, I determined not only my concurrence with all three theologians' doctrines, but the state of progression of thought is that which ordered itself as I did through this paper.⁴⁹ I naturally found myself in agreement with Barth on the complete “otherness” of God, that anything “knowable” about God can only come from God Himself revealing Himself. God is a God who wishes to be known, who instills that in His creation, yet which remains in a realm where knowing that one “is known” is impossible save for the gift of God's revelation itself. I then found that I agreed with Pannenberg's logical exoneration of just what this implies of God⁵⁰ (being that which Scripture attests, a gives the ability to know attributes of), especially that of God being both transcendent based on His holiness, yet all embracive of that “fallen” creation which is opposed to Him and which cannot commune with Him in its state of rebellion.⁵¹ The paradox this entails—which Jewett is keen on merely accepting is that state in which I now stand. For while I cannot explain the “how” in which God is entirely “other” (based on his Holiness), yet before all things and in which all things “hold together,” (things which are not “holy,” which cannot be in relation to Him); the beauty of this paradox lay in the embrace of the very mystery which defines it.⁵²

⁴⁹That is, from Barth, to Pannenberg, and ending with Jewett.

⁵⁰That of the logical delineation of the “Divine Infinite.”

⁵¹See footnote 44 on the previous page for clarification.

⁵²Rather—that is, than a desire to make “order” out of paradox, eg. “*2-1 Shampoo + Conditioner*.” In this case, the “2” of God's transcendence and His immanence can be in 1 bottle without losing those parameters and conditions which maintain both their individual fullness and their independence from one another.

On God's Revelation

Scripture

Unique to note throughout Scripture is the dynamic between God being revealed in all things, God hidden, and God giving himself through particular means. God appears to reveal himself in nature,⁵³ in our daily lives,⁵⁴ in Christ,⁵⁵ and ultimately, in our relationship to Christ, whom holds all knowledge and wisdom available,⁵⁶ though at oft mentioned only through the Spirit.⁵⁷ Yet truly, it is evident that it is not man who comes to know God (or desires to do so),⁵⁸ but God who reveals Himself to Man.⁵⁹

Theological Standpoints

Barth makes it quite clear that God is not revealed outside his choosing. God is the hidden one, who “chooses” to reveal Himself—which to Barth is God's very act of speaking (that is, the spoken Word of God is the act of God's revelation, which is God Himself⁶⁰), according to His good pleasure. Barth categorizes The Word of God (revelation) as requiring a constant revealing afresh,⁶¹ as meaning that God indeed speaks,⁶² having a personal quality void of

⁵³Rf. Psalm 19:1-4a, Rom. 1:20.

⁵⁴Rf. Acts 11:16-18.

⁵⁵Rf. Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:1-3.

⁵⁶Rf. Col 2: 2b-3, Matt. 11:27.

⁵⁷Rf. 1 Cor. 2:10-15.

⁵⁸Rf. Rom. 8:7, 1 Cor. 2:14, Eph. 2:2-3, Col. 1:21.

⁵⁹Rf. Deut. 29:29.

⁶⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol 1, 132, 295.

⁶¹Ibid, 132.

⁶²Ibid, 132.

definition,⁶³ implies a purposive character⁶⁴ (which Barth states to be Lordship: God reveals Himself as Lord⁶⁵), is God in action (which means it is in constant contemporaneity, has power to rule, implies deliberation and decision)⁶⁶, and remains a paradoxical mystery.⁶⁷ To Barth then all revelation of God is particular (special). That is, because revelation of God *is* God—The Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, there is no general revelation which speaks of God without revealing God Himself.⁶⁸

Pannenberg's doctrine of revelation places emphasis that the biblical understanding is multifaceted. In one accord, revelation places *history* as the unique mode in which God reveals himself; that is, "history" as we know it (conceived as human action) is actually a string of events in which God has acted to make Himself known. This is based on his understanding of OT narrative, which suggests that Israel viewed history as a means of divine revelation.⁶⁹ Although Pannenberg agreed with Barth on the subject that God's revelation relies solely on

⁶³Ibid, 136-137. "God's Word is not a thing to be described nor a term to be defined." (p. 136)

"Understanding the Word of God not as proclamation and Scripture alone but as God's revelation in proclamation and Scripture, we must understand it in its identity with God Himself. God's revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (p. 137)

⁶⁴Ibid, 139.

⁶⁵Ibid, Vol 1, 306, 314.

⁶⁶Ibid, 143-161.

⁶⁷Ibid, 162-186.

⁶⁸Barth confronts the dilemma of passages such as Psalm 19 and Romans 1 inconsistent with his theology with an understanding that those who have come to know God outside of His revelation—specifically in Scripture, have merely *already come to know Him through* His revelation. That is to say, these passages—according to Barth, speak of and to those who have already come to know God's Word, not of those of haven't. Thus, he maintains that there is no "general" revelation outside of God's Word, yet after being revealed God's Word, man can find His truth and revelation in many and much outside of it.

⁶⁹"Israel in OT days viewed history as divine action. It spoke of the 'acts of God' or of the totality of these acts."
 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 230.

God's choosing,⁷⁰ he held that Barth's understanding of “general revelation” was somewhat idiosyncratic and inept.⁷¹ Pannenberg held that while “general revelation” does nothing in the way of “settling” the issue one way or another of God's existence, it allows for framework in which “make talk about God intelligible and can thus establish criteria for it.”⁷² Thus, he referred to “general revelation” as purely “talk about God.”⁷³ Accordingly, Pannenberg held that revelation will only be made fully known in the realm of our future resurrection—the Eschaton.⁷⁴ He rejected not only *direct* revelation, but the distinction between special and general revelation, arguing there to be only one self-disclosure of God, and that the meaning of the present will only be made known in later interpretation,⁷⁵ culminating in the eschaton which provides the ultimate revelation and understanding of history.⁷⁶

Before distinguishing between God's “general” and “specific (that is, redemptive)” revelation, Jewett postulates precisely just what “revelation” is. After clarifying what it is not, Jewett stated that it is God's act of disclosing Himself—making Himself and His will known to those creatures bearing His image.⁷⁷ And while the bulk of his discourse is on Jesus Christ being

⁷⁰Ibid, 2-5; 189.

⁷¹Ibid, 103.

⁷²Ibid, 95.

⁷³Ibid, 95.

⁷⁴For this—and the rest of the paragraph, cf. Pannenberg, “Dogmatic Theses on the Concept of Revelation.” 125-155.

The deity of God is not yet revealed completely and objectively to all people, except in the fate of Jesus, in whom “the resurrection of the dead has already taken place, though to all other men this is still something yet to be experienced,”(141) and “the fate of Jesus Christ is the anticipation of the end, and thus the revelation of God.”(143)

⁷⁵That is, we interpret previous events in the world to see God, which gives us faith for our future resurrection.

⁷⁶It is the fate of Jesus which is the ultimate revelation, in whom we experience the eschatological reality of our future resurrection.

⁷⁷Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 68.

the “Special” revelation of God attested to by Scripture, he covers with brevity that which has been coined “general” revelation—as spoken of in Romans 1, etc. He talks of God's revelation analogous to “reality,” quoting Lewis as the ability to distinguish between what *is* and what *ought to be*. This is to say, to Jewett, general revelation is not that which has a clear definition of the God Yahweh, but an ability to observe the “present” reality (at any given moment) and recognize the difference between *it*, and what ought to be—a reality inherently not present, vague, yet ideal.⁷⁸ It is this reality which—*through* special revelation, Christendom comes to know *is* the Kingdom of God (or rather, God Himself through Christ Jesus).

Conviction

This is another doctrine which I had until recently, given no extensive thought in. Truly, I would say my formulation of a doctrine has been influenced by the doctrines of the three correspondent theologians, in which they agree with my overall theology. I believe **any** revelation of God is **indeed** God Himself. For there is a progression of revelation through the Biblical narrative which *culminates* at the Cross *and* to which has seemingly altered the way God reveals Himself since. This crux indeed lay in the Cross, but I speak specifically of the tearing of the veil. For it is in *this event* the manifest presence of God poured out from where it “earthly” resided,⁷⁹ into the world which had been (up until this advent) poetically separated from Him. There are those who understand this to convey symbolically that those particular to Christendom now have free access to the Holy of Holies and by result, the presence of God.⁸⁰ This not only

⁷⁸Ibid, 71-72.

⁷⁹That is, within the Holy of Holies.

⁸⁰This is to say that our “sin nature,” that which kept us from entering into the presence of God without being utterly destroyed by the consumption of Holiness, has now been lifted. That through Christ's atonement, we can *now* enter this presence freely. Thus, the act of Christ rendered the old covenant passed, and a new covenant

simplifies the power of the Cross⁸¹, but truly hinders the ability to witness the mystery of God active in present creation, reconciliation,⁸² and revelation. The God who pours out of the Holy of Holies actively makes Himself known (revelation), rather than passively waiting to be disclosed; The God who pours out and reveals Himself, by doing so actively speaks. This is the same God who—by speaking, actively *creates*. I believe then, in a God who has poured out of the Holy of Holies into a world which is inherently in rebellion against its presence—being both infinitely “other” by His Holiness, and holding *all things* together in spite of (or perhaps, *because of*) their lack of/rebellion against *holiness*, present in action, active in presence, “*making*”(creating) *all things new* through the revelation of both the inequity of man due to his sin nature, and the ultimate love manifest in the Son, freely sacrificed so that man may know his Creator. Revelation is indeed therefore, *always* particular,⁸³ we merely can't consistently see it as thus.⁸⁴

On Scriptural Inspiration

Scripture

established.

The errors in this logic lay in the implications (whether purposeful or not) that God remains in one earthly dwelling place. Even if this is refuted, the symbolism remains the same—that God, who in Him all things hold together, is confined to one place which—while the doorway has broadened (that is, the “allowance” of entrance for more than just the priest—who was required to be “ceremonially clean”), it remains exclusively for those who “accept” the reconciliation of the Cross. The second error lay in the conclusion that if God remains in the Holy of Holies and only those who are “believers” are allotted the ability to enter into this presence whilst still (Scripturally) having a sin nature which cannot be in the same presence of Holiness, then it is not *the sin nature* (as Scripture attests to it being) which cannot be in the presence of God, but the inability to recognize and acknowledge it that cannot be in the presence of God.

⁸¹Of Reconciliation.

⁸²Or rather, a revelation of that which has already been accomplished, cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19.

⁸³Understood as that which leads directly to the “process” of salvation through (specifically) the revelation and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

⁸⁴Until that time, as Pannenberg would accede, that all things are revealed. That we will know as we are known: the 7th Day.

While Doctrines like that of the Trinity are both particular and exclusive in Christendom, concerning Scripture itself (that is, its inspiration, inerrancy, authority, so on)--while of paramount importance to Christendom, appear upon further review to nevertheless be quite inclusive.⁸⁵ Indeed (with regard to Scriptural inspiration), “no definition of the doctrine has ever commanded a general consensus in the church.”⁸⁶ The most cited and discussed passage to which the Christian doctrine (and conflict thereof) of Biblical inspiration predicates is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The critical term, *theopneustos* (θεοπνευστος)⁸⁷ occurs exclusively to Hellenistic Greek and is found solely in this passage. Furthermore, we can easily see that the OT is full of statements and phrases claiming to be the Word of God. "Thus says the Lord" occurs 418 times in the NASB, "God said" occurs 46 times in the NASB, God spoke through His prophets,⁸⁸ and through His people.⁸⁹ In the NT, we find not only affirmation of Scriptural inspiration,⁹⁰ but of Christ himself promising that which is the *agent of* inspiration.⁹¹

Theological Standpoints

⁸⁵Being based on a definition of *exclusivity* as “incompatible; not admitting of anything else.” In this case, meaning that while at its core, the doctrine of the Trinity is that which irrevocably is incompatible with any Doctrine or method that would “conflict” with its core tenets, and of which would definitively affect all other Doctrines of Christendom, and very well Christendom itself as such. Doctrine on Scripture—in contrast, seems to allow for variance in certain doctrinal theses whilst maintaining the core doctrines of Christianity in and of itself.

⁸⁶Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 126.

⁸⁷Translated idiomatically “inspired by God,” broken down, literally means “God-breathed.” Thus, it refers to the work of the Spirit (root word here being πνεω, “breath”/“breathing”; relating to πνευμα, being Spirit) in the writing of Scripture.

⁸⁸Rf. 1 Kings 14:18, 2 Sam. 24:11-12, Zech. 7:7.

⁸⁹Rf. 2 Sam. 23:2, 1 Kings 22:24, 2 Chron. 20:14-15.

⁹⁰Rf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21.

⁹¹Rf. John 14:26.

Properly speaking, a subject like “inspiration” can be understood only in relation to the full doctrine of Scripture, and especially the doctrine of revelation itself or the Word of God of which it forms an integral part. Particular for Barth, this is of utmost witness. The interweaving of each of his doctrines is clear in his understanding of inspiration—if only being that which is least expounded by Barth, yet most criticized by opponents. To Barth, “the Word of God is God Himself in Holy Scripture.”⁹² For Barth, inspiration is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Bible;⁹³ it lay not in the text *itself*, but both *before* and *after* it in the writer and the reader.⁹⁴ As such, the Bible then is divinely inspired, but only inasmuch as a “witness is not absolutely identical to that which it witnesses.”⁹⁵ Thus, for Barth, the text itself is limited, but that can be overlooked because inspiration lay not in the text itself, but that the Bible *becomes* revelation through a continuation of the Holy Spirit's *inspiration* surrounding it.

Like Barth, perhaps the aspect of Pannenberg's theology which has been most criticized by evangelical theologians is his treatment of Scripture. Yet Pannenberg never argued against the claim that the Scriptures are inspired, but rather against using the claim of inspiration as a *means of presupposing their truth*. For Pannenberg, inspiration lay ultimately in that influence on the Biblical writers which—through the same Holy Spirit who influenced the writers, leads those

⁹²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol 1, 457.

⁹³*Ibid*, 571.

⁹⁴Barth sees this union of inspiration manifest in two passages: 1 Cor. 2: 6-16 and 2 Cor. 3: 4-18. The first has to do with the writer, who cannot proclaim Christ apart from the work of the Spirit. The second has to do with the reader, who cannot understand the Bible apart from the hidden work of the Spirit.

⁹⁵*Ibid*, 463.

who inquire to a revelation of Christ and salvation.⁹⁶ Thus, Pannenberg's view of inspiration⁹⁷ is defined not by method, but by result: that which reveals Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

While Jewett affirms the “inspiration” of Scripture, he definitely allows for some discrepancy between God’s eternal “Word” and the words of the biblical writers. Jewett's argument lay in that it does not escape it's humanity by being divinely inspired, but rather, it is inspired in words so human (will fallibility) that one “cannot doubt its humanity.”⁹⁸ Yet again, with Jewett, there is a beauty in that paradox that is God interacting with Man—here characterized as the inseparability of the Divine and the Human in Scripture; all divine, all human, seamlessly woven together.⁹⁹ Thus, while not all which the prophets and apostles, as the “inspired” teachers of the Church, have said is contained in Scripture, Divine inspiration has provided what is sufficient for faith and practice and will never be superseded.¹⁰⁰

Conviction

It effects me as much dishearteningly as it does disconcertingly, the fear associated with a Scripture that may not be inerrant, nor “inspired” according to that which is deemed the *correct* definition of inspiration. I would contend that the weight given to the Biblical text is directly

⁹⁶Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 454.

⁹⁷Characterized as influence directly from the Spirit of God, upon the mind—utilizing man's rational powers rather than physical, revelation to be what writers experienced rather than it being the writings themselves, both revelation and record are progressive—neither complete at the beginning, all Scripture taken together, inclusion of same Holy Spirit, Scripture is then sufficient both qualitatively and quantitatively for religious purpose, ought to lead to Christ. *Ibid*, 454-464.

⁹⁸Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 140.

⁹⁹*Ibid*, 142.

¹⁰⁰ Paul K. Jewett, “Special Revelation as Historical and Personal,” Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible. Contemporary Evangelical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958 / London: The Tyndale Press, 1959. pp.45-57.

proportional to trust in the personhood of God and relationship therein. Those who put tremendous stock in Scripture are oft those who if fault were found in the text, would—while proclaiming Christendom itself in jeopardy, really fear for their *own personal faith in Christendom*.¹⁰¹ I believe Scripture to be witness to that which is true; divinely inspired to testify of that which is the revelation of God both desiring to be, and actively making Himself, known. And while a witness does not have to be inerrant for its testimony to be such, I believe there is much that we in our finitude cannot know or comprehend of it (Scripture) in full. This is no fault of the text, but rather, that we are “faulty.” But perhaps both the murkiness surrounding Scripture, combined with our “faulty” capacity for knowing “in full,” is purposed by the very Sovereign God who designed that the text which we have at our current disposal—both in English and the original languages, is that which He intends. Perhaps the mystery of it all *itself* has purpose,¹⁰² and that truly is Trust in God.

In an episode of Doctor Who, the Doctor—comforting his distressed companion in the midst of panic tells her softly, “You need to start trusting me, it's never been more important.” She responds, “But you don't always tell me the truth.” The Doctor smiles and states, “If I always told you the truth I wouldn't need you to trust me.”¹⁰³ Perhaps this is very much God's hidden dialogue with His creation. Much like boarding a time machine space ship¹⁰⁴ for the first time requires an initial willing suspension of disbelief, perhaps God begets us the same way to begin

¹⁰¹The downward spiral usually progresses like this: If the Bible is the work of men, then it is no more reliable than any other book produced *by* man. Further, if the Bible is unreliable in *any* part, how could we rely upon *any of it*? It would be no more authoritative than any other human book. And finally, if the Bible is not of divine origin, and therefore, unreliable and not authoritative, then we could derive very little comfort from its pages regarding eternal salvation—which, indeed is the purpose of it all!

¹⁰²Including even, our inclination and pursuit to have it all “make sense.”

¹⁰³Steven Moffat, “206b ”Flesh and Stone,” Doctor Who, season 5, Netflix, directed by Adam Smith (United Kingdom: BBC One, 2010), <http://www.netflix.com/> (accessed November 12, 2012).

¹⁰⁴TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension in Space)

relationship. Yet when that time has passed, when we begin to question errancy and inspiration and what we're given in Scripture and that which isn't fully revealed to us, it's then that God's true desire—our trust in Him, unveils.

On The Nature of Sin

Scripture

Of all that is written about in Scripture, it would seem 3 topics stand at the top tier of most written, across the span and entirety of Scripture: the Lordship of God (Yahweh), “fearing” not, and Sin (ἁμαρτία, a concept written in the OT regarding going “wrong;” and αμαρτανω in the NT, meaning “to miss the mark”). While there are countless passages describing the nature of sin, it's clear the overarching theme throughout Scripture points to its inherence in our very being. Thus, it is critical to note that there is nothing inherently good in this nature,¹⁰⁵ it is inherently death,¹⁰⁶ it has been such (one could even correctly say that it has “always been”) since creation—the first man,¹⁰⁷ and is present in all¹⁰⁸ from before birth.¹⁰⁹

Theological Standpoints

Because Barth admitted no knowledge of the Divine, nor humanity's relation with such save for that which God revealed, his doctrine on sin is built solely through the reconciliation act

¹⁰⁵Rf. Rom. 7:18.

¹⁰⁶Rf. Rom. 6:23.

¹⁰⁷Rf. Rom. 5:12-13.

¹⁰⁸Rf. Rom 11:32.

¹⁰⁹Rf. Psalm 51:5, 58:3.

of Christ on the Cross.¹¹⁰ In the doctrine of reconciliation humanity is not only confronted with the positive side of the truths in Jesus Christ, but also the negative side of the truth of sin in the world initiated by humanity and its victim. Barth takes this ministry¹¹¹ to embody all that which is not merely the “will” of God (that is, God Himself), but as the necessity of focus;¹¹² for to Barth, Sin is not its own ontological identity as something that “exist[s] in and for itself” as a part of God’s creation; rather it is alien to the world¹¹³ and “exists and is in opposition to the will of God and therefore in opposition to the being and destiny of His creature.” Thus, for Barth, sin can only be understood truly through the understanding of the reconciliation: in which because of the revelation of the love of God—in Christ Jesus, man's inherent nature is also revealed, that sin is nothing more than the denial of humanity's true humanity.¹¹⁴

Pannenberg remains future oriented, even in his doctrine of sin. For him, sin is only recognized through faith. That is, we are not truly aware of our sinful nature until we come into a life of faith—that of “knowing” Jesus.¹¹⁵ Thus, it is not only through the Cross (much like Barth) that a revelation of God's essence is achieved, but of man's destiny which was obscured by the fall from creation. This destiny is the very same *Imago Dei*; humanity is destined to be created in the image of God.¹¹⁶ The crowning implication herein is that human guilt is a

¹¹⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol 4, 79.

¹¹¹Rf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19.

¹¹²Ibid, Vol. 1, 30.

¹¹³Rf. Rom. 5:12.

¹¹⁴Ibid, Vol. 4, 128-156.

¹¹⁵This is to say, while the implication of the “fall” was death, Pannenberg holds that death is not a penalty imposed from without, but an inherent condition which causes a cyclical system of self-preservation at the same time robbing us of the power to accept life. Our “sin” is death, yet it is our fear of death which drives us more deeply into sin.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Waco: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 273.

¹¹⁶Ibid, 211, 265-266, 271.

consequence of present wrong actions and failures, not as a consequence of an inherent characteristic of human nature. For, if there was no fall and human nature is inherently inclined to sin, there is an inference that God's creation of humankind is imperfect. Pannenberg seems to infer that we are being brought from an original state of imperfection to a perfected state, which is the *Imago Dei*.

Jewett plainly describes Sin as that which arises solely out of our unwillingness to accept our finitude, rather than out of the finitude itself.¹¹⁷ In it comes the corruption (but not the destruction) of our will—that is, our freedom of action.¹¹⁸ Jewett proposes that the doctrine of Sin is the objective affirmation about the human condition. Further, it is not in the Sin nature *itself* in which death lay, but rather, our conscience—that given by God as part of the *Imago Dei* (lasting, regardless of the fallen nature), which conscious of Go'd commandment, works in that nature—unrelenting, to death of us. “Thus sin is shown to be what it really is, sin that is sinful beyond measure (Rom. 7:7ff).”¹¹⁹

Conviction

When reflecting on the label “The Nature of Sin,” my mind envisions scientific investigation of sin in an attempt to discover its basic essence and make up; hoping to reach some conclusion as plainly as that of the “Nature of Water” being a liquid substance comprised of two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen molecule. Interestingly enough, I think that—like the “nature of water,” the “nature” of sin is simultaneously as obvious as it is obscure. The very

¹¹⁷Paul K. Jewett, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: a Neo-Evangelical Theology*, ed. Mrs. Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), footnote, 62.

¹¹⁸*Ibid*, 74-75.

¹¹⁹*Ibid*, 82.

essence—the “Nature” of Sin is death, comprised of equal parts “missing the mark,” “not measuring up,” and “falling short.” Yet what lay within this conclusion is the opaque mystery of death whilst living; the vague concept of “perfection;” and the doom that because sin is inherent to the human existence from before birth, we're not even afforded the chance of endeavoring to “measure up” to the established criterion. The “Nature” of Sin then, damns us before we even begin, for we are born into a world expecting us to do that which we by design cannot do.

Thus, I believe death to not be the result of man's actions or “nature,” but the state which man is born into: man begins “life” in death. And so the first “sin,” indeed was death. For if God's act of speaking is Creation, if God's Revelation of His Word “creates,” then the first Sin is that which was set up in opposition to creation: death. And if God holds “all things together” in His active creating, death (sin) is equivalent to both a void (for what can be opposite of all things? Nothing. Void.), and in it, a falling apart.

Yet much like the nature of water, the nature of sin is also defined based upon its relation to an other. It's in this that the genuine “nature” of sin can be understood. If we are to truly believe that the Cross is the culmination of all things, where “it is finished,” being the plan from the fullness of time (lamb slain from the foundations of the earth), then Sin must be understood through the lens of the Cross. It is here that I would posit my doctrine of the necessity of Sin. For God creates us with a nature which will never be what He expects.(Romans 11:32) I postulate that this is for our benefit, not our curse. For the God that desires to be known is Love. And this love cannot be fully known in its perfection (by those who are in its image and likeness, but not it itself) without imperfection. That is to say, Sin is necessary because without it, we would not have a means to come to know the absolute perfect Love of God. We must fall short

lest we think we are loved because we don't. We must not measure up nor have the ability to do so—and be aware of it, lest we think love is somehow earned and achieved if we do.

So while the Nature of Sin can readily and appropriately be defined (and thus, indoctrinated) autonomously, it is through its relation to the personhood of God that a clear, holistic exposition—one which does not pigeonhole itself to a purely finite understanding, can be tested and approved.

Conclusion

I believe that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. I believe that His purpose for creating was Love—as He is Love; and from a desire to be known, for Love desires that which to love, and that which can know Love outside of itself. I believe that we are still in God's 6th day of creating. That is, from the scriptural creation account forward, God has been “making” mankind in His image. I believe this image to be that of His Son—the spoken Word and agent of creation, Jesus. I believe that because Jesus is called the lamb slain from the foundations of the earth, and Scripture attests to the “plan” and “purpose” of God, God required and allowed for the first man and woman to “fall,” creating a nature bound to sin—which is death. I believe that it is this very condition and state of being—dead, that is inherent in the human condition; that is, apart from God, there is only death and void, as this is the realm in which we are born into. However, I believe that this sin nature is necessary for God to reveal His love through the atonement—Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I believe this same Jesus *is* light in the darkness, life in the death, revelation to the lost that they are not for God knows He'll find them right where they are, and a filling of the void—creation, birth in a womb of nothingness. I believe the atonement of the Cross was the once and for all Sacrifice fulfilling both the Law as

given to us who by nature since the first sin sought/seek knowledge of the good and the evil, and that which makes known the Love of God. I believe this event to *be* God's judgment on the world, according to Scripture (the Gospel of John); that man is judged by the Cross, and that judgment is love. I believe that sin—both leading to the cross, and since the historical act, is man judging both himself and the world, perpetuates a void in the substance, for personal judgment is non submission to *the* judgment, love. I believe that Christ's atonement was for all humanity, and according to Scripture, accomplished reconciliation with God, who does not count men's sins against them. I believe that it is not a “choice” to believe, but a willingness to be convinced of, or rather, a willing suspension of disbelief, which bears witness to the reality that is (reconciliation of God and man), and which brings man out of the natural state of death we are born into. I believe that we are romanced to God, who sees us blameless and pure through the blood of Christ. I believe that it is we who are faulty in our perceptions, thus through the Cross and relationship with the triunity of God we come to see, to know, and to accept that which is inherently true, though hidden or misunderstood by humanity. I believe that God is infinitely *better* than I can think. I believe that the love of Jesus is deeper than I *know*. I believe the Spirit is everywhere working the wonders of grace and love. I believe that the story *is* finished, it is simply not yet finished being told.

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