

Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology and the Use of Theological Sources

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KEY WORDS

| Sources | Pannenberg | Trinity | Scripture | Christ |

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I address the problem of determining which traditional sources (scripture, reason, tradition, experience) are authoritative in the construction of theology. The solution, I suggest, is not favouring one source against other, but including them all in a holistic and mutually affirming manner. To do so, I apply Wolfhart Pannenberg's trinitarian theological method of part and whole, and particular and universal. In Pannenberg's theology, Christ is both the norm of revelation and the agent of self-differentiation. Therefore, with Christ as the norm, I relativize theological sources as contextual revelations of Christ based on context. While I affirm Christ as the source of self-differentiation, I also affirm the universalizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. My hope is that theology will focus less attention on theological sources and determining which source is authoritative, and focus more on the God who reveals. If all of history itself (including all of the traditional Christian sources) is affirmed as a theological source, God's omnipotence, eternity, and glory will be all the more glorified.

INTRODUCTION

Theological prolegomenon is constitutive of any coherent theological systematization. Theology proper, defined as the study of God, implies a kataphatic posture relative to the works and attributes of God, for human concepts and expressions are said to say something positive. Among others, the systematic theologian uses historical, exegetical, and linguistic methods to articulate a larger philosophic worldview¹ apologetically relevant to a *Sitz im Leben*. Part and parcel to theological method, and the primary focus of this paper, are theological sources. Where does the theologian mine the data she subsequently selects, uses, interprets, and applies in her context? Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are traditionally posited as primary sources. But herein lies the difficulty in systematic theology. Methods and sources are many, but a clear and consensus voice remains elusive. Theologians are increasingly

methodologists, who, according to one ethicist, are preoccupied with clearing their throats, and not using it; the throat clearing goes on on for so long that the audience loses interest.² But it seems theology is not only preoccupied with throat clearing but determining which throat to clear in the first place.

The purpose of this paper is not to adjudicate the various sources but to subsume them under a higher norm. This paper assumes that the primary norm of Christian theology is neither scripture, tradition, culture, nor experience, but Christ. Utilizing Wolfhart Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in which part and whole dialectically interact and supplement one another, I argue that the self-differentiation of the second person of the Trinity in the economy which witnesses to Christ's eternal differentiation also makes possible the incorporation of the various sources as they progressively, and

1 For instance, postmodern, postcolonial, postliberal, fundamentalist, or existential.

2 Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 163.

contextually, reveal differentiated parts of the one revelation. Moreover, I also consider the Spirit and its unifying (making whole) role in history. For Pannenberg, the Holy Spirit is not simply an external divine inspiration of sources, but a “force field” already inherent and active within creation. This, I argue, broadens the potential source of theological knowledge to everything. And everything as a potential source means mental energy can be refocused from methodological throat clearing to the constructive theological task itself.

WHAT ARE SOURCES AND NORMS?

Before I do all that, I will define what sources are and how they adjudicate Christian theology. I use James Cone’s definition as he offers a helpful distinction between sources and the norms that govern them. For Cone, “Sources are the relevant data for the theological task, whereas the norm determines how the data will be used. It is often the case that different theologies share the same source, and it is the theological norm which elevates one particular source (or sources) to a predominant role.” To illustrate his definition, Cone exemplifies two leading theologians, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Both theologians share sources (Bible and culture), but each theologian respectively assigns one source a higher normative status than the other. Barth norms the Bible; Tillich norms culture.³ For Cone, the uniqueness of a theological project is not necessarily the source, but the norm that interprets it. Although “sometimes it is possible to perceive the norm of a particular theology by an evaluation of the selection and analysis of its sources...this is not always the

3 James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 22-23.

case, because most theologies share common sources.”⁴ Thus, the foundational question to ask in theological construction is which norms are authoritative.

Roger Olson identifies several authoritative sources in Christian theology. “While there is no uniform agreement about the sources and norms of Christian theology for Christian belief, a rough consensus has developed...that there are *four main specific sources and norms* properly used by Christian theologians... scripture, tradition, reason and experience.”⁵ Among the four, Olson upholds scripture as the primary “common ground” of all Christian methodologies with a “special status of authority for determining who God is and what God wants with people ... scripture may be the sole supreme source and norm for Christian belief but it is never alone.”⁶

Similar to Cone, Olson’s account delineates primary (scripture) and secondary (everything else) sources in Christian theology. But as Cone’s analysis indicates, theologies sharing a primary source (in this case the Bible) does not necessarily entail that scripture acts as the primary norm. As all Christian theology ostensibly upholds the authority of scripture, the issue is one of hermeneutics. Which source is the norm, the hermeneutical lens by which one interprets the primary source of scripture? Is the norm scripture self-reflexively communicating itself? Tradition? Reason? Culture? As Cone indicates:

The theological norm is the hermeneutical principle which is decisive in specifying how sources are to be used by rating their importance and by distinguishing relevant

4 Ibid., 27.

5 Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 57-58.

6 Ibid., 57.

data from irrelevant. For example, most theologians would agree that the Bible is important for the work of theology. But there are sixty-six books in the Bible, and how are we going to decide which books are more important than others? The answers to this question range from the fundamentalist’s verbal-inspiration view to the archliberal view that the Bible is merely one of many records of religious experiences. In all cases, the importance and use of the Bible are determined by the theological norm which is brought to the scripture. Theologians with a kerygmatic consciousness would like to think that the norm arises from scripture itself, but this is not always easy to determine.⁷

Cone identifies black experience along with biblical revelation as the norm and source of his theology.⁸ Another biblical theologian is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who, though critical of the androcentric “kyriarchy” of certain sections of scripture, still emphasizes the norm of female experience⁹ along with “the Bible as a source of empowerment.”¹⁰ Heiko Oberman identifies two types of tradition in the Roman Catholic Church. Tradition I represents scripture as the final norm; Tradition II represents the dual authority of scripture and the church.¹¹ Even in Tradition II, the authority of scripture is necessary. Adolf Harnack, who demythologizes the gospel into a “simple gospel” of love, still sees scripture as holding the kernel of the true gospel.¹² In these theologies,

the focus is not on scriptural authority, but the source that normatively interpret scripture. Scripture is interpreted via tradition, reason, experience, or scripture itself, or specifically, as a verbally inspired document, a witness to liberation, a feminist source of empowerment, and a source of inerrant and propositional truths among others.

But in a postmodern and pluralistic milieu the determination of the norm can become problematic. Anthony Thiselton thus comments, “All claims to knowledge, indeed what is deemed to count as knowledge, arises only from within some given social tradition.”¹³ Moreover, Sallie McFague argues that theological metaphors and models are useful only insofar as they are ‘shocking,’ that is, relevant.¹⁴ Theological models in one context do not easily translate onto another and “each generation must venture through an analysis of what fulfillment could and must mean for its own time, the best way to express that claim.”¹⁵ In a relativistic culture how do we discern truth? If all sources and norms are particular manifestations of context, is truth revelation impossible?

I disagree with McFague’s call to replace traditional models and sources deemed anachronistic¹⁶ for two thousand years of theological history should not just be discarded. Thus, my proposal is as follows. If the norm is Jesus, less energy will be spent qualitatively determining which source is primary, or

7 Cone, *Black Theology*, 37.

8 Ibid., 38.

9 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2015), 17.

10 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xiii.

11 Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Briel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 371-373.

12 “The Debate on the Critical Historical Method:

Correspondence between Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth,” in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology, Vol. 1*, ed. James M. Robinson (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 166-174.

13 Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Harper Collins, 1992), 395.

14 Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 35.

15 Ibid., x-xi.

16 Ibid., xi.

contextually relevant, in interpreting scripture. Instead, the various sources will quantitatively reveal parts of the norming norm that is Jesus as interpreters interact with the biblical text. Applying this to theological sources, each part (source) will be a contextual instrument that reveals parts of God's revelation through Christ. In this model, revelation discerned via sources do not compete for normativity but are part of the greater whole. Information discerned via particular sources are provisionally normative revelation relevant to a particular cultural or historical context or even the type of knowledge communicated (e.g. propositional, experiential, aesthetic, spiritual, etc.), progressively building toward a greater knowledge of Christ which then retroactively clarifies the initial parts. In sum, I agree with Thiselton's hermeneutical diagnosis. But as an alternative to McFague, I propose the dialectical and mutually affirming interplay of part and whole, and particular and universal of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology. God is "the unifying unity of the totality of the finite,"¹⁷ the "fundamental ontological vision" is a "differentiated totality" in which parts are not eliminated but affirmed in relation to the whole.¹⁸ The dialectical interplay between part and whole preserves not only the integrity of provisional revelations via specific sources but affirms finitude itself in addition to the transcendent norm that is Jesus.

THE TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY OF ECONOMIC PART/WHOLE

Pannenberg's part and whole relationship is supported by the self-differentiated (part) but

united (whole) relationship of the three persons of the Trinity as each member is unique but also united into one divine essence.¹⁹ In creating the world, God turns outward. Subsequently, the unique identity of the Father as monarch, divine, and father is conditionally dependent on economic happenings. According to Pannenberg, "The action of the one God in relation to the world is not wholly different from the action in his trinitarian life. In his action in relation to the world the trinitarian life turns outward, moves outside itself, and becomes the determinative basis of relations between the Creator and the creatures."²⁰ Foundational to the differentiated totality of the triune God is the ministry of Jesus Christ, who as the Word of God is the "quintessence of the divine plan for creation and history and of its end-time but already proleptic revelation."²¹ As the immanent and economic trinitaries are identified, the historical actions of Jesus self-differentiate not just the historical Jesus but the eternal Son from the Father. The self-differentiating acts of Jesus Christ through his historical actions can be described as such:

The premise is that Jesus distinguishes himself from the Father as one who bears witness to him, as we again see in John (8:18, 50). Along this line the Johannine Christ says that the Father is greater than he (14:28) and that his own word is "not mine but the Father's who sent me" (14:24). Here again John stresses a point that is found in the Synoptic tradition. Jesus will not let himself be called "good Teacher" because "no one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18). He thus distinguishes himself from God and sets himself as a

17 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 143.

18 Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 88.

19 The trinitarian structure is particularly important as sources are communicating trinitarian revelation.

20 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 5.

21 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 257.

creature below God as he asks his hearers to do in his message of the nearness of the rule of God. The same subordination to the Father may be seen in his not knowing the time of the end (Mark 13:32 par.), in his reply to the sons of Zebedee that it was not for him to assign places of honor at his side in the heavenly kingdom (Matt. 20:23 par.), and finally in his subjection of his own will to that of the Father in the prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36 par.).²²

As Jesus self-differentiates, he confirms his identity as the unique second person of the economic and eternal trinity. The self-differentiation is mutual, the Father's deity and kinship is dependent on the Son's activity in the world and whether the Son properly glorifies him and fulfills his mission.²³ But as a differentiation without boundaries completely disconnects the Son from the Father, Pannenberg also speaks of the self-differentiated characteristics of the Father and Son that is nonetheless united in divine essence:

Precisely by distinguishing himself from the Father, by subjecting himself to his will as his creature, by thus giving place to the Father's claim to deity as he asked others to do in his proclamation of the divine lordship, he showed himself to be the Son of God and one with the Father who sent him (John 10:30)...As Jesus glorifies the deity of the Father by his sending and in his own relation to the Father, he himself, in corresponding to the claim of the Father, is so at one with the Father that God in eternity is Father only in relation to him.²⁴

Finally, as a member of the trinity, the Holy Spirit is also self-differentiated from the Father and the Son but united to both:

As Jesus glorifies the Father and not

himself, and precisely in so doing shows himself to be the Son of the Father, 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.²⁵

The purpose of my paper is to discern how the differentiated unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit interact and inform the part and whole relationship of sources and norms. I argue that Christ is the norm of the Father's revelation, the interpretive lens by which sources can be understood. Moreover, as Christ is the instigating agent of self-differentiation, Christ enables the contextual earthly sources which output the diverse theologies, revealing parts of himself through each respective provisional source and revealing the Father in the process. The Spirit, in turn, is the unifying agent that accumulates information gathered via provisional sources, propelling toward the ultimate unified knowledge of the eschaton. Christ and Spirit are mutually interactive, as both part and whole are consistently affirmed and reaffirmed in a historical process.

REVELATION AS THE NORMATIVITY OF CHRIST

As Christianity does not concern relative or provisional truths but seeks truth, it is crucial to identify an absolute norm. In Christianity, the norm is Christ. In Barthian terms, Thomas Torrance helpfully describes this norm:

Jesus Christ is the Truth of God actualized in our midst, the incarnate faithfulness of God, but He is also man keeping faith and

22 Pannenberg, *ST I*, 309.

23 Pannenberg, *ST I*, 313.

24 *Ibid.*, 310.

25 *Ibid.*, 315.

truth with God in a perfect correspondence between His life and activity in the flesh and the Word of God. In Him there is utter consistency between God the Word revealing Himself to man and man hearing, believing, obeying, and speaking His Word. Not only is He the incarnation of the divine faithfulness but the embodiment and actualization of the divine faithfulness in answer to God's.²⁶

Indeed, Pannenberg's use of sources can be explained by comparing and contrasting it with Karl Barth's theology of the Word. Barth famously established the primacy of the Word (Christ) in an act of revelation that manifests itself through three forms (or as I have been calling it, sources), the Word preached, the Word written, and the Word Revealed. For Barth, the primary form is the Word of God revealed, the incarnate person of Jesus Christ; Scripture and preaching are merely derivative revelations: "Among the three forms of the Word of God, that can be said unconditionally and with strictest propriety only of revelation, not with the same unreservedness and directness of Holy Scripture and of Church proclamation as well."²⁷ Scripture and proclamation only become the Word when acted upon from above.²⁸ However, though scripture and proclamation are derivative forms of the Word, there is "no distinction of degree or value between these three forms."²⁹ The economic revelation of Christ in the economy via the threefold form of Christ, speaks of a unity-in-differentiation that not only reveals the same Christ through different forms, but also mirrors the immanent

trinity.³⁰ Derivative sources (Word of God preached, Word of God written) are relativized in a part and whole matter that reveal pieces of the one Christ as it is acted upon from above.³¹

Like Barth, Pannenberg sees knowledge arriving via the self-revelation of Christ. But for Pannenberg revelation arrives via *Historie*, the process of actual history, not through a special history called *Heilseshichte*.³² As the ministry of the earthly Christ establishes a trinitarian ontology in which Christ is self-differentiated from the rest of the trinity, the revelation of Christ in history is revealed via the process of history. For Pannenberg, "The eternal act of the Son's self-differentiation from the Father would then contain the possibility of the separate existence of creatures. As the self-distinction of the Son from the Father is to be regarded as an act of freedom, so the contingency in the production of creatures would be in continuity with such freedom."³³ The fullness of the revelation of God is revealed indirectly through concrete and differentiated events in history. "Theological questions and answers are meaningful only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation—the history moving toward a future still hidden from the world but already revealed in Jesus Christ."³⁴ The fullness of revelation will only be revealed at the end of history, as revelation progresses through history as part and whole continually and dialectically supplement and

26 Thomas F. Torrance, "The Foundation of the Church" in *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 125.

27 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God. Vol. 1.1 of Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 349.

28 Ibid., 133.

29 Ibid., 136.

30 Ibid., 121.

31 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God. Vol. 2.2 of Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 101.

32 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. 1.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1970), 15.

33 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 42.

34 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," 15.

complement one another. But in Jesus, the incarnate one, who represents the fullest sense of differentiation-in-unity and part and whole, the fullness of the revelation has already been revealed. In Jesus, “The resurrection of the dead has already taken place, though to all other men this is still something yet to be experienced,”³⁵ and the “fate of Jesus Christ is the anticipation of the end, and thus the revelation of God.”³⁶ Therefore, the revelation of God through the indirect acts of history is the ministry of the second person of the Trinity who instigates and establishes the legitimacy of differentiated revelations via differentiated sources in differentiated periods of history. Cornelius A. Buller thus comments, “In this conception of the Trinity, the Son distinguishes himself from God the Father, and in so doing he becomes the source of everything that is distinct from the Father.”³⁷

If Barth minimizes history for fear of its abuse, Pannenberg affirms it by relativizing it under an eschatological future. “Eschatology exposes secular man’s illusions about the possibilities of self-realisation in this world, and therefore eschatology is at the heart of a Christian realism in appraising the conditions of human existence in the present world.”³⁸ Therefore, it is my contention that Pannenberg’s historical model affirms all theological sources as differentiated expressions of Jesus in history as pieces of information are progressively revealed (until its eschatological completion)

35 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Dogmatic Theses on the Concept of Revelation,” in *Revelation as History* (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1969), 141.

36 *Ibid.*, 143.

37 Cornelius A. Buller, *The Unity of Nature and History in Pannenberg’s Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 44.

38 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 2 (1984), 124.

and incorporated into the greater whole. As Christiaan Mostert comments, “Human essence is not above time; it is historical. History does not illustrate a constant human essence but determines even constitutes it.”³⁹

The revelation of Christ revealed in history will utilize all sources and methods found in history. But how does Pannenberg interact with the four traditional sources I indicated above and how do they progressively reveal information while also utilizing a part and whole dialectic? To that question I will now turn.

PANNENBERG’S USE OF SCRIPTURE, TRADITION, REASON AND EXPERIENCE

In his essay “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” Pannenberg asserts scripture as that which attests “the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰ But if scripture has a particular task of revealing Christ, the universal task of theology uses reason and relatedly, knowledge derived from other disciplines.⁴¹ As “the word ‘God’ is used meaningfully only if one means by it the power that determines everything that exists,”⁴² the two sources, scripture and reason, are neither mutually exclusive nor compete against one another. The relationship between the particular (scripture which reveals Christ) and universal (reason which reveals meaning) is a part and whole relationship that “proceeds by a constant dialectic of the particular and the universal. For Christian theology, therefore, universal meaning through reason requires

39 Mostert, *God and the Future*, 71.

40 Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” In *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. 1, 1.

41 *Ibid.*, 1.

42 *Ibid.*

grounding in the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth himself, but this particularity is not rightly understood until its universal meaning is articulated.⁴³ As Mostert indicates, “Every event has its meaning in connection with other events, and ultimately with the totality of events. The flow of time will always give rise to new understanding. Historical meaning is therefore always provisional. Understanding reality as history implies openness to the future.”⁴⁴

But because Pannenberg is a Christian theologian, he upholds scripture as the primary interpretive source. “A theology that remains conscious of the intellectual obligation that goes along with the use of the word ‘God’ will try in every possible way to relate all truths, and therefore not least of all the knowledge of the extra-theological sciences, to the God of the Bible, and to attain a new understanding of everything by viewing it in the light of this God.”⁴⁵ And connecting this to my earlier discussion on sources and norms, Pannenberg’s norm is not a “Scripture-positivism,” a kind of rational and universal task, a science of everything which scripture is not meant to perform.⁴⁶ Instead, scripture reveals the Christ (the de facto norm) as experienced and recorded in the Judeo-Christian Bible.⁴⁷

Experience is another valuable source. Human beings are ecstatic in nature “and to that extent spiritual...To the extent that human beings exist exocentrically...and experience themselves from that vantage point, the life-giving power of the spirit which raises them above their own finiteness, manifest itself in

an intensified form.”⁴⁸ These experiences are then tested against the particular revelation of the Bible (historical experiences of Christ that have been codified), as universal history then debates, tests, and critiques the validity of these experiences.⁴⁹ So with Pannenberg’s understanding of experience, we also see how the particular and the universal interact and complement each other toward greater knowledge. The fourth source for theology, tradition, operates similarly. Tradition is a depository of accumulated experiences, interpretations, and authorities, which, like experience, is subject to testing, refining, and transmission” through the process of universal history.⁵⁰ Thus, scripture, reason, experience, and tradition reveal different aspects and perform different functions of revelation holistically, mutually, and dialectically. Underlying the epistemological process is the norm of Christ.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, CHRISTIAN SOURCES, AND PANNENBERG

But even if Christ is established as the norm by which the contributions of various sources are understood, and even if Christ is the means by which the sources are differentiated in the first place, a question remains unanswered. How do we determine when particular sources during particular times act as or become revelation? Meaning cannot be determined by the text (not just in the literal sense of scripture, but also reason, experience, and tradition) itself, but as

43 Mostert, *God and the Future*, 61.

44 Mostert, *God and the Future*, 72-73.

45 Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” 1-2.

46 Ibid., 3.

47 *ST I*, 15.

48 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 524.

49 Ibid.

50 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “What is Dogmatic Statement” In *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1970), 186.

an interpreter reads and understands it.⁵¹ Grenz and Franke assign to the Spirit a necessary role in the historical development and formation of Christian sources and their interpretation.⁵² Thus, the Holy Spirit can be seen as a “reader” who determines meaning as she “reads” text (scripture), reason, experience, and tradition; meaning is not “in” these sources themselves but as the Holy Spirit acts upon them. For instance, the authority and meaning of the Bible does not lie in the Bible itself, but as meaning is derived via “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, which are the product of the Spirit’s revelatory and inspiring action.”⁵³ For tradition, congregants “suffer” the work of the Spirit in church practices.⁵⁴ And for reason, only the Spirit can transform that which “has been so twisted by sin that the humans inevitably attempts to transform the revelation she receives into an idol.”⁵⁵

To Pannenberg, the Spirit is a created grace, a “breath of life that is already given to humanity at creation (Gen 2:7).⁵⁶ And the Spirit as the “breath of Yahweh is a creative life force” present everywhere in creation⁵⁷ so that all of creation via the universalizing power of the Holy Spirit is a potential source for Christian

theology.⁵⁸ The universal Spirit reads the various sources not only within the context in which they appear but as a universal framework by which universal meaning is supplied. Thus, the Spirit is the agent of the eschaton.

This pneumatological approach has three advantages. First, the Spirit seen as supernatural, *contra* created, grace belies the incarnational ministry of the Word and the Spirit, a determinism in which the natural processes of creation and freedom are not given proper agency; the danger is absolutist concepts with little concern for context. Second, when authority is derived via external inspiration of the Spirit, focus shifts to the source and not on the inspiring power already latent in creation. The results are theological debates on prolegomena which often leads to an overemphasis on justifying sources. By emphasizing all of creation as a potential Spirit-laden source of theology, Pannenberg returns the attention to God, *sub ratione Dei*. Pannenberg’s approach, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen explains, “Funds a dynamic, multifaceted divine action, providence, and causality. To be the Creator is far more than being the world’s cause. While causality should not of course be eliminated from the theological thesaurus, the main focus should be placed on the living, dynamic, creative presence of the Creator in the world.”⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I attempted to address a problem in contemporary theology, the problem of

51 Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 107.

52 Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 116.

53 Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 28.

54 Hutter defines this as a “cultural-pathic model” Reinhard Hütter. *Suffering Divine Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 26.

55 Keith L. Johnson, “Natural Revelation in Creation and Covenant,” in Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: *An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 142.

56 *ST III*, 9.

57 *ST I*, 373.

58 To Pannenberg, subsequent spiritual endowments are not new but “topping up” of created endowments. John R. Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 3.

59 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Vol.3: Creation and Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 185-186.

determining which sources are authoritative. I suggested that the solution is not favoring sources against each other, but including them all in a holistic and mutually affirming manner. To do so, I applied Wolfhart Pannenberg's trinitarian theological method of part and whole, and particular and universal. With Christ as the norm, I relativized theological sources as contextual revelations based on context. While I affirmed Christ as the source of self-differentiation, that is, the source of the particular and the present, I also affirmed the universalizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. My hope is that theology will focus less attention on theological sources and determining which source is authoritative, and focus more on the God who reveals. If all of history itself (including all of the traditional Christian sources) is affirmed as a theological source, God's omnipotence, eternity, and glory will be all the more glorified.

A persistent criticism placed at Pannenberg for decades is distinguishing between the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the demonic spirit of the world. If Pannenberg's doctrine of revelation assumes a universal Spirit suffused throughout creation is there any way to differentiate between good and evil? As Pannenberg writes, "According to the NT witness the world as a whole has come indeed under the tyranny of an ungodly force, the prince of this world gives us cause to reckon with the dominion of a destructive power of this nature."⁶⁰ The differentiation between good and evil spirits comes insofar as the Holy Spirit is able to overcome egocentric sin and create new life through the power of exocentric relationality. Thus a demonic spirit can be seen in the presence of entropy in the world for "the temporal inversion in the structure of natural

forces and their operation causes them to become ungodly and demonic forces only when they close themselves against the future of God."⁶¹ Pannenberg necessitate the proclamation of the gospel as a present application of Christ's reconciliation of the cross. He avoids associating the Spirit with a supplementary inspiration of a gospel that is already Spirit-filled. Nonetheless, the proclamation, insofar as it proclaims the life-affirming and exocentric gospel of Christ provides at least a noetic recognition and epistemological authority of an eschatological reality

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60 ST 2, 108.

61 Ibid.

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