

# Pannenberg's Programme

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ONE OF THE LIGHTS shining on the horizon of contemporary theology is the young professor of theology at Mainz, Germany, Wolfhart Pannenberg. His brilliance has already been appreciated on this side of the Atlantic; this appreciation is shown, for example, in the dedication of the third volume in the "New Frontiers" series to his thought.<sup>1</sup> Pannenberg's significance, apart from the unusual ability and equipment which he brings to his task,<sup>2</sup> lies in his Barthian-like effort to fulfill a Bultmannian responsibility. That is, he would establish theology in its independence and integrity and at the same time recognize its responsibility towards the Bible as an historical witness to an event of historical revelation. His method is based upon an understanding of revelation as history which encourages him to agree with Bultmann that theology must respect historical questions, and with Barth that theology cannot be dependent upon hermeneutics. Yet his position is a departure from both Barth and Bultmann, for while Barth avoids hermeneutics, he does not turn to history as such for theological truth, and while Bultmann looks to history, he insists upon the need of a hermeneutic in order to understand history.<sup>3</sup> The concern of this paper is simply to explicate Pannenberg's method, to indicate its material possibilities by asking about the view of Christian existence and freedom implicit in the position, and to raise questions about its adequacy.

## I. THE LANGUAGE OF FACTS

Pannenberg's fundamental premise is that the Bible understands and witnesses to the facts of Israel's history as the progressive revelation of God's glory. He does not admit to the distinction between fact and meaning, between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, as if facts could ever be seen for what in fact they are without a grasp of their meaning.<sup>4</sup> Facts, as he conceives them, are *Geschichtstaten*—the unity of historical meaning (*Geschichte*)

1. *New Frontiers in Theology III*, cf. James Robinson and John B. Cobb (eds.), (New York: Harper & Row, in press). See also the fine article by Carl E. Braaten, "The Current Controversy on Revelation: Pannenberg and His Critics," *Journal of Religion*, 41 (1965), 225-37.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 234: "Of all the post-World War II theologians, Pannenberg has shown by far the widest scope and the greatest constructive power of thought."

3. For a clarifying discussion of Pannenberg's position in the theological spectrum, cf. *ibid.*, p. 225.

4. Thus, for example, he states that "the Christ-event bears its meaning originally in itself." Cf. W. Pannenberg, "Analogie und Doxologie," in *Dogma und Denkstrukturen*, Wilfried Joest and Wolfhart Pannenberg (eds.) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963), p. 91.

and historical facts (*Taten*).<sup>5</sup> The biblical *Geschichtstaten* (I shall refer to them simply as "facts") are those acts of God in which he progressively reveals who he is and so unfolds his glory.<sup>6</sup> The story moves in such a way that each stage of revelation supersedes the preceding. From the Mosaic emphasis upon Sinai and the law, the drama moves to the Deuteronomic concern for the land and the monarchy, a concern which is supplanted by the prophetic word of judgment executed in the fall of the kingdom and the exile. The last word of Old Testament faith is an apocalyptic vision of a goal beyond history for all history, a goal that radically limits Israel's particularistic claims on the one hand and encompasses Gentile history within a now universalized movement of salvation-history on the other hand.<sup>7</sup> At the end of all history (and only at the end) will the Lord be revealed in his fullness and essence as the one and only God.<sup>8</sup> The New Testament witness to Jesus is the final revelation in the sense that in his resurrection the fact of the final apocalyptic event is proleptically revealed—that is, it is demonstrated, anticipated, and assured. Jesus' resurrection is not the end, but it is the last word about the end, and will not be superseded or denied.<sup>9</sup>

Two of the formal aspects of this understanding of salvation-history need to be underlined: first, that God is revealed by the plain, ordinary facts themselves, without supplementation by "faith" or "the Spirit" in the one who views the facts;<sup>10</sup> and second, that the revelation in the facts is "indirect."

"Factual revelation" simply indicates the ability of facts to speak for themselves.

The events which reveal God and the message which reports these events bring man to a knowledge which he does not have in himself. But these events have a really convincing power where they are apprehended for what they are, in the context to which they belong from the beginning, where they speak their own speech, the speech of facts.<sup>11</sup>

The biblical revelation is in principle public, and even in the Gospel of John, where Gnostic influences result in the suggestion that the Spirit and the faith of the believer are necessary conditions for understanding, the Spirit and faith itself are referred back to the self-evidencing fact of Jesus as their ground and source. The life or history of a Christian cannot be reduced, as by the existentialists, to the present moment of faith or decision; rather it belongs to "a continuous stream of events," a "connected sequence not only of one's own decisions, but also of occurrences which together constitute . . . [a] wholly particular and unique history."<sup>12</sup> The past is not

5. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 100ff.

6. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 92f.

7. Cf. the conclusions to the article by R. Rentdorff, "Die Offenbarungsvorstellungen im Alten Israel," in *Offenbarung als Geschichte (Kerygma und Dogma, Beiheft 1)*, Wolfhart Pannenberg (ed.), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1961), pp. 40f.

8. Cf. Pannenberg, "Analogie und Doxologie," p. 97.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 106.

10. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 98ff.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

12. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart im Lichte der Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962), p. 96.

at all a matter of indifference, for it is the life story without which the particular and ongoing events of the present would have no meaning.<sup>13</sup> So also the meaning of a biblical event is in the event or fact itself as a part of a story, and not in the decision, faith, or spirit that interprets the event. Faith is not the revealer or creator of meaningful history, as certain Bultmannians and Lutherans contend; rather, history is the meaningful creator of faith.<sup>14</sup>

This emphasis upon the "speech of facts" is the key to Pannenberg's hermeneutics, which he would distinguish from historical investigation. The former is concerned with the gulf between the text and the interpreter, or the problem of "understanding"; the latter asks about the thing or fact (*Sache*) in itself as reported by the text, or the problem of history.<sup>15</sup> Pannenberg's point and thesis is that the understanding sought by hermeneutics is given by the facts established through historical investigation; no special hermeneutic is required to release the meaning in the fact.<sup>16</sup> Here Paul Althaus voices an expected criticism, insisting that "the wisdom contained in faith distinguishes itself from rational knowledge in that it is knowledge in faith."<sup>17</sup> Pannenberg answers that in the view of Althaus, "the decision of faith grounds the certainty of the content of faith, and that this is the sort of understanding . . . which I must reject, because thereby the grounding of faith upon a truth *extra me* is actually surrendered for the sake of faith's self-establishment."<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, this view of history means that revelation is indirect—a progressive revelation of facts about God and not of God in the facts.<sup>19</sup> In the apocalyptic vision we learn about God that he will reveal himself directly and in his essence at the end in an inclusive and universal judgment.

13. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 96f.

14. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik and Universal Geschichte," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 60 (1963), 90–93.

15. Cf. *ibid.* Pannenberg here claims to follow aspects of the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who says that the Schleiermacher-Dilthey-Bultmann line errs by foregoing an historical concern for the facts (*Sache*) in the interest of understanding. See Gadamer's "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," in *Martin Heidegger zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag: Festschrift* (Berlin: Neske, 1959), pp. 24–34. Gadamer observes that the understanding of a text is first of all "das Einverständnis in der Sache" (p. 25). Whoever would understand a text "is prepared to have something said to him by the text" (p. 25). Understanding means "primarily to understand the *Sache* and then secondarily to lift out and understand the meaning of the other as such" (p. 31). In short, there is no understanding which is not first a knowledge of the thing itself (*Sache*).

16. As we shall see, Pannenberg prefers to reserve the word "faith" to characterize the Christian life that proceeds from the knowledge of the facts. See *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, pp. 100ff.

17. Paul Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube: Bemerkungen zu Wolfhart Pannenberg's Begriff der Offenbarung," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 88 (1963), 325.

18. W. Pannenberg, "Einsicht und Glaube, Antwort an Paul Althaus," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 89 (1964), 83ff. In this respect Pannenberg's thought resembles that of Barth, who, while he does not separate faith and knowledge, does make the point that faith as trust presupposes, and is not to be confused with, faith as knowledge. Cf. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 22ff.

19. Indirect revelation is a revelation "that does not have God immediately as content. Every act of God, each of his works, can say something about God indirectly. It can state that God is one who does this and that." Cf. *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, p. 17. See also pp. 7–20.

Then he will appear "as the God of all men, just as had been expected since the time of the prophets."<sup>20</sup> Gnostic and later idealistic forms of Christianity are chiefly responsible for the misconception of a direct and immediate revelation of God in his eternal essence prior to the eschaton.

This insistence on indirect communication guards the historical nature of revelation, for the speech of historical facts can be significant only as indirect revelation; otherwise they would be merely the means of a direct revelation to which they must become immediately transparent. Their particularity and pastness, their historicity, would then lose their voice and any claim upon the present, and since it is only in the uniqueness and difference of the past that it has any claim upon the present understanding, the past as such would be lost to the present.<sup>21</sup>

## II. THE MESSAGE OF THE FACTS

What, materially, does Israel's history say? Openness, universality, and particularity, answers Pannenberg. Openness is revealed initially in the experience of Israel and comes into full-orbed expression in Jesus. Universality is pointed to in Israel, assured by Jesus, and realized in the movement of Christendom into the Hellenistic world. Particularity is attested by resurrection as the form of the end. Let us look briefly at each of these elements.

Openness is the other side of the formal statement that revelation in Israel is indirect, for this means that the direct and full revelation is always ahead. Israel's revelation is from the beginning a revelation of a promise that directs Israel to the future, toward the land of promise. It is true that Israel frequently (as when the land had been occupied and the monarchy established) lived by the secondary tradition of fulfilment that bound it to the past rather than by the original tradition of promise which always pointed toward the future. But the prophets repeatedly called Israel back to the promise, seeing in the fulfilments of the past only assurances of the faithfulness of him by whose promise Israel lives. Pannenberg notes that modern Western man, as an inheritor of the biblical tradition, also lives toward the future, but in so radical a way that he is losing, not only his tradition, but also the very concept of tradition itself. Tradition can of course be absolutized and mythologized, so as to bind man to it rather than offering him possibilities for the future. Nevertheless, without tradition and the vision it affords, the present has no real freedom for the future. What is needed, then, is a renewal of the prophetic, biblical tradition, in which the past is at the same time always a promise.<sup>22</sup>

The openness of Christian theology parallels the openness of Christian existence. "The understanding of reality as totality is always only approxi-

20. *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, p. 98.

21. Cf. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik und Universal Geschichte," p. 105.

22. Cf. Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?* pp. 1-11, 86-95.

mate, and changes itself unceasingly. . . ."<sup>23</sup> Theology is "petition" and "doxology," in the sense that on this side of the eschaton it can only petition and praise God for its success and adequacy. It is proleptic, speaking "continuously of something which will appear in an incomprehensible future."<sup>24</sup>

Israel's history not only says that God is the infinite God of the future who, as the one who is to come, draws Israel's history forward, but also envisions him apocalyptically as the universal God, as the goal and fulfilment of all history. Consequently, universal history becomes salvation-history; just as Israel drew from its past assurances of God's promise as well as possibilities for its future, so man as such, the Gentile man of Christian history, is free to claim the promise assured in the resurrection, and live toward the future from the resources of his own past. In the realm of theology this means that the Christian can, for example, claim from his Greek and Hellenistic heritage possibilities for theological expression and development.<sup>25</sup>

History as the speech of facts connotes not only openness and universality, but also concreteness. The particularity of the fact cannot be transcended and denied in the name of some universality, since the end of all history is not some non-historical principle but the resurrection of the finite, concrete, and historical man of space and time, body and spirit.

Openness, universality, and particularity—these are the elements of history, and corresponding to these is the threefold form of the word of the biblical witness. Pannenberg states this threefold form in the seventh thesis of his programmatic essay: "The Word of God relates itself to revelation as prophecy, instruction, and report [*Vorhersage, Weisung, Bericht*]."<sup>26</sup> In his discussion of the thesis he clarifies by speaking of "promise," "instruction," and "kerygma" (*Verheissung, Weisung, and Kerygma*).<sup>27</sup> He means, as we have seen, that an event in the salvation-history of Israel and Jesus speaks only in so far as it is an event in the fulfilment of a past tradition of promise (*Verheissung*), and therefore reiterates and confirms the promise. It is also a *Weisung* that provides direction or possibilities for the future which it promises.<sup>28</sup> *Kerygma* is the form of the word peculiar to the New Testament. It reports the proleptic realization

23. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Was ist eine dogmatische Aussage?" *Kerygma und Dogma*, 8 (1962), 94.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 96. See also Pannenberg, "Analogie und Doxologie," pp. 96–115. In this *Festschrift* for Edmund Schlink, Pannenberg expresses his debt to Schlink for the notion of theology as doxology. He summarizes his own point of view as follows: "All biblical talk about God, in so far as it intends to point beyond a particular deed of God to God himself as he is from eternity to eternity is rooted in an invocation [*Anbetung*] and is in this sense doxological" (p. 99). The gist of the entire article is that this invocational and doxological dimension of theological language establishes it as analogical.

25. Pannenberg maintains that, while Hellenism was open to the universalism of Jewish apocalyptic, it stumbled over the resurrection as the symbol and form of this universality. Resurrection presupposed the context of the Jewish view of man as a unity of body, mind, and soul. The appropriation of this anthropology is necessary to recognize the fact and truth of resurrection. See Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?* pp. 107ff; "Analogie und Doxologie," pp. 93f.

26. *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, p. 112.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 112f.

28. See Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?*, pp. 86–94, for clarification of the meaning of the dogmatic theses.

and fulfilment of the promise in a final, apocalyptic event which includes all events and so universalizes the dialectic of Israel's existence. Through the kerygma the movement of Israel from past to future with a word of promise and direction becomes the paradigm of all history.

### III. THE UNITY OF HISTORY

Lastly, we ask about the unity of these aspects—universality, particularity, and openness (and thus also about the unity of the threefold form of the word). We ask how the particularities are respected and yet united with the realities of the present in a movement toward a new universal horizon. We ask, in other words, how the past is both promise and direction (law).

Pannenberg states that the future is a synthesis of yesterday's horizon with that of today in a new horizon which transcends and includes them both. He evidently finds a clue to an understanding of the synthesis in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which seeks to maintain the claim of the past and the understanding of the present in the creation of a new horizon through the act of faith (made possible by the proclamation of the resurrection). Gadamer, like Pannenberg, rejects the solution of the Schleiermacher-Dilthey-Bultmann line in which the past is interpreted as an expression of an abstract, universal, human possibility as this appears in the existence of the interpreter.<sup>29</sup> The past in its pastness is lost to this view, say Pannenberg and Gadamer, as is its claim on the present, which resides only in its factual particularity and difference from the present. The manner of meeting in which the past is respected and yet comes to understanding in the present is described by Gadamer as "the melting together of the horizons" into a new horizon or "higher generality."<sup>30</sup>

But while this "melting of the horizons" describes the process, it hardly explains it. A key to Pannenberg's meaning is provided, I feel, in his fine little book on man, *Was ist der Mensch?* Here he delineates this movement or passage from past to future through the present in terms of fantasy and of words with which man is able to overcome the present and create for himself the higher and future world of culture. But the power behind the words, the spirit that animates them, is fantasy.<sup>31</sup> Fantasies are not created *ex nihilo*; creative as they are they have a passive aspect. They are not conjured up wilfully in a moment of decision, but are given to and received by the inner man as a gift from God through the mediation of the past.<sup>32</sup> "The traditions with which a man has grown up open to him above all a manifold of possibilities for life."<sup>33</sup> Yet the past proves itself relevant only as it is transformed—only as it becomes a fantasy of future reality.<sup>34</sup>

29. Cf. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte," pp. 98ff.

30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), pp. 286–290, quoted by Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte," p. 106.

31. Cf. Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?*, p. 19.

32. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

34. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 89f.

The melting of the horizons appears to mean, then, that the future, on the one hand, and the past and the present, on the other hand, are mutually determined. Yet, how this takes place, and how it is that the emerging new horizon lays claim to truth, is not yet clear.

To this point Pannenberg understands himself to be in agreement with Gadamer, but he feels that Gadamer's position is not adequately grounded because of his failure to appreciate the third form of the word, the word as *Kerygma*, which proceeds from the actualization of the apocalyptic vision in the resurrection. He insists that hope and faith, which have the possibility and the courage of uniting past and present horizons in a new and future horizon, imply faith in a universality that does not deny the significance of the concrete facts (as does the universalism of Hegel, which Gadamer so rightly eschews), but includes them and unites them into a meaningful historical whole. Gadamer is satisfied to rest the claim of the past, and the need to create a new horizon out of the past, on the finitude of every present horizon or synthesis—in the fact that there is something unsaid in all that is being said. He seeks to overcome this finitude and move toward the unsaid universal by penetrating beyond the facts and the language of facts. This effort to penetrate the facts threatens to obscure the horizon of the past as preserved in the facts and to promote an abstraction which denies historical concreteness and distance. But in Pannenberg's judgment, to say that history leaves something unsaid is really to say that all the facts are not in. The unsaid "can be derived only from the statement available, and only through these can the unity of Being in the background come to consciousness."<sup>35</sup> All the statements are not yet available, and only at the end of history, as promised by the resurrection, will being be fully defined, disclosed, and directly revealed. Gadamer's confidence in the emergence of new meaning through the melting of the two horizons demands the kerygmatic faith. Or, in other words, the tension of law and promise, past and present, cannot be maintained without the universal word of the resurrection. Therefore, Pannenberg observes that the power of fantasy, which was disparaged by the Greeks, could and did arise only within the Hebraic-Christian tradition. The trust (*Vertrauen*) that gives man disposition (*Verfugen*) over his past and present in a creative vision of the future, is rooted in the biblical revelation. "Faith in the invisible God of the Bible who is beyond all that is finite has given without remainder the world of finite things into the disposition of man."<sup>36</sup>

In effect, this discussion so far has been an attempt, by reference to the many articles and publications of Pannenberg, to interpret and comment upon the seven theses advanced by Pannenberg in his programmatic essay, "Revelation as History." By way of review let me summarize and paraphrase these theses: (1) Revelation is indirect, not of God, but of acts which talk about God; (2) Direct, immediate revelation takes place at

35. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutik und Universalgeschichte," p. 113.

36. Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?*, p. 29.

the end of history; (3) Revelation is public and universal; it is the speech of facts which can be heard by all who will take the facts as they are in the context of their life story; (4) The final, apocalyptic revelation, which is anticipated in Jesus' resurrection, is universal, for since it is beyond history it includes all history; (5) The only prerequisite to seeing the revelation of God in holy history, and especially in the resurrection of Jesus, is the anthropology implicit in Israel's existence and apocalyptic expectations; (6) When this apocalyptic meets the Greek vision of immortality and universality it comes to more complete expression by the use of the language of philosophy, which it is free to employ; (7) The word of God is related to revelation in a threefold word—the word as promise, direction, and *Kerygma*. These roughly correspond to prophecy, law, and gospel.

#### IV. MAN AS HISTORY: EXISTENCE AS FAITH

We have been considering Pannenberg's programme—his understanding of revelation as history. Inasmuch as he states that "man is historical by nature," it is obviously not a big step from what has been said so far to a summary statement of his view of human existence and freedom. We take this short step in conclusion, in order to put into relief aspects of Pannenberg's position which will then serve as a basis for appraisal.

Pannenberg sums up his understanding of existence as "faith" which, he says, "has to do . . . with the future." Faith is therefore "trust," a trust in and openness for the future, that will be justified or discredited by God at history's end.<sup>37</sup> "Man is altogether open-ended. He is directed beyond every experience, beyond every given situation, again and again into the open."<sup>38</sup> But this drive into the open is at the same time a drive toward universality.<sup>39</sup> Eternity is the unity of life itself, which has no more adequate symbolization than the resurrection.

In any particular moment of history this freedom for the future means the freedom to write history through the creative power of fantasy come to expression in words; it means to conquer the world through the creation of culture. Such creations move toward the universal future in so far as they embrace the past as the source of the creative fantasy, the present in an inclusive outreach of love and justice, and the future by the acknowledgment of that ultimate unity which makes relative all that is both past and present.

In this viewpoint there is no essential problem in existence, no tension between past, present, and future, between flesh and spirit, or between the finite and infinite, for all of life in all its dimensions is called forth to the universal fulfilment. Sin, however, does enter. There is such a thing as false freedom, so that, when true freedom appears, there also appears a

37. Cf. *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, p. 101.

38. Pannenberg, *Was ist der Mensch?*, pp. 9f.

39. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 23: "Der Mensch als weltoffenes Wesen ist immer auch angewiesen auf das in jeder Situation undurchschaut bleibende Ganze der begreifender Wirklichkeit."



freedom-from. Because of a faithless myopia which cannot envision the future, which will not put its trust in things to come, the ego takes the occasion of its self-relatedness (*Ichhaftigkeit*) to attempt to secure itself rather than to entrust itself.<sup>40</sup> Existence becomes a matter of security rather than confidence (*Sicherung statt Vertrauen*).<sup>41</sup> Without trust in the God of history, who promises to justify and unify history at the end, man must root that justification and unity in his own ego. The result is either that the present moment of the ego becomes itself the centre, at the price of a lifeless abstraction from past and future, or that it surrenders itself to an alien and extrinsic centre. In its more primitive stages, it surrenders itself to an absolutized and mythologized past, a past which denies the present rather than serving it as a source of history-creating fantasy. It may also sacrifice itself, and therewith all history, to an abstract and timeless unity of its own creation. Freedom-for, therefore, also means freedom-from, freedom from the tyranny and pride of the ego's time and history on the one hand, and from its slothful surrender to the tyranny of a mythological past or a non-historical eternity on the other.

Freedom for freedom (salvation) is a gift of both nature (history) and grace (salvation-history). Man may absolutize himself, or surrender himself to an eternal past or timeless present, but regardless of his efforts time marches on, history moves, and these absolutes will be overcome by the judgment of a history moving out toward that universal and inclusive end which is envisioned in scripture. On the other hand, by the grace of the tradition of promise in the revelation of Israel, as it is confirmed and assured in the resurrection of Jesus, there is offered the possibility of trust—the life of faith which has the courage of both historical relativity and the creative pursuit of universality and unity.

## V. EVALUATION

What is to be said about this position? In the first place, let it be said that the apocalyptic vision of the unity of all facts—past, present, and future—in a universal history speaks refreshingly in accordance with the rather common-sense view of history found in the Bible, which gives a concreteness and fullness to the conception of freedom and existence that one does not find in Bultmann and his followers, or, for that matter, in Paul Tillich. Yet Pannenberg is in tune with the times to the extent that he appears to agree with Bultmann, with the post-Bultmannians Ebeling and Fuchs, and also with Tillich, that Jesus is not so much the object as the source of faith. Faith is not so much a present relationship to the Jesus-event as it is a proper relationship to the present, made possible by the event of Jesus' resurrection. There is a difference from the prevailing mood, however, to the extent that Pannenberg emphasizes the past as fact. Bultmann denies the speech of facts and defines freedom as freedom from fact—the facts of

40. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 40ff.

41. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 22–31.

past and present (which he dubs "nature")—a freedom in which man is a movement toward a future void of concreteness and particularity. Tillich also denies the speech of fact, and would have man transcend facts for the universal ground of being which expresses itself in facts as symbols. We may say then that for Tillich the law of the past is affirmed, but without the concreteness of the past, whereas for Bultmann the promise of the past is claimed, but without any concreteness or direction. Each denies what is really meant by the past. One surrenders the past to the infinite and the other surrenders it to the absolute ego. The result in both cases is a present moment that is void and abstract. Pannenberg's view, which appreciates the fact as fact, is more biblical, and recognizes that history is an event of the whole man in the concreteness of his psychophysical existence, in the context of time, past and future.

Nevertheless, some readers will feel that Pannenberg has paid too high a price for his success, so that there are aspects of his thought which apparently fall short of traditional understandings. In view of his denial of direct revelation, it seems impossible and incorrect to speak of a freedom "for God." God in his being is yet to be revealed, and the Holy Spirit is not to be understood as conveying immediately to the spirit of man the being or spirit of God himself. The spirit, says Pannenberg, leads rather "to the truth of the word and so proves itself as the power of the word itself."<sup>42</sup> In the New Testament the spirit is especially associated with the resurrection and means "nothing other than that the hearer of the news really takes its content into himself."<sup>43</sup> It signifies that the word of resurrection has really been spoken. The spirit is not the condition of hearing, but a sign of the speaking of the fact.

Of course, in Pannenberg's perspective, these remarks will seem not so much critical as descriptive. He insists that to think otherwise of an immediate experience of, or freedom for, God is to err. But then it is surprising to see Pannenberg in his Christology taking seriously traditional Christological symbols, which appear to speak of an immediate unity of God in his essence with the being of the man Jesus. He understands "the mode of God's presence in Jesus"<sup>44</sup> rather traditionally as "the essential unity of Jesus with God" (*Die Weseneinheit Jesu mit Gott*),<sup>45</sup> as "the unity of Jesus with the eternal being of God."<sup>46</sup> One must in fact say that "in Jesus God himself has come out of his otherness (*Jenseitigkeit*) into our world."<sup>47</sup> He believes that such incarnational thinking is the final necessity of a theology which proceeds from thought of the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus.<sup>48</sup> But lest we think that this way of speaking seems to contradict Pannenberg's rejection of the notion of an immediate, essential presence of God in Jesus

42. Pannenberg, "Einsicht und Glaube," p. 89.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

44. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1964), pp. 113–131.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

48. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 157.

and Christian experience, he explains that when the Jesus-event is viewed in the context of Jewish apocalyptic we shall understand that the language of incarnation designates the proleptic appearance of the eschaton and not the appearance of God; it signifies God's real presence at the end.<sup>49</sup> The incarnation means simply that "through the Christ-event it is defined once for all who or what God is," namely, "the God who makes the dead alive."<sup>50</sup> It is evident that the Christological symbols have simply been transformed by Pannenberg, that his method does not explain them so much as explain them away, and that the cause of clarity might be better served if he were to follow the path of more radical theologies and forego responsibility for the traditional symbols altogether.

A similar criticism may be made at the other pole of the Christological question, for just as Pannenberg fails to articulate meaningfully the traditional view of God's essential presence in Jesus, so also he fails to make sense of the equally traditional affirmation of Jesus' essential participation in the event of revelation. The man Jesus appears to contribute nothing significant to the event, for in the first place the meaning of the event is largely determined by Jewish apocalyptic expectations. "Without the horizon of apocalyptic expectation it is impossible to see how the man Jesus should be the final revelation of God."<sup>51</sup> It was the gnostic, Hellenistic world that was ripe for a mythological transformation of this apocalyptic thinking into that of a pre-existent Jesus who descended from heaven only to be later raised again.<sup>52</sup> Such myth can be avoided only by keeping the event in the perspective of Old Testament apocalyptic.

In the second place, the moment of revelation is the resurrection-event as such, and not so much the resurrection of Jesus. The revelation does not occur in or during Jesus' life, but to him after his life, at the end of his ways.<sup>53</sup> "The resurrection of Jesus is not only constitutive of our knowledge of his deity, but also of the being of the same."<sup>54</sup> The man Jesus appears to be part of the *Kerygma* only in so far as in his message he was directed toward the coming, apocalyptic event of God's lordship, and salvation is present in him only in so far as his hearers accepted his message.<sup>55</sup> It would seem that the word "Jesus" signifies nothing beyond that which is before and after him, namely, apocalyptic expectation and apocalyptic fulfilment. The honour ascribed in the title "Messiah" must be seen finally "along the lines of the fulfilment of the messianic hope of Israel."<sup>56</sup> Old Testament prophecy and apocalyptic have not melted together with the Jesus-event, but dissolved it.

Pannenberg is sensitive to this criticism, but does not appear to have overcome it. He answers by pointing to the essay of Ulrich Wilckens in *Offenbarung als Geschichte*,<sup>57</sup> agreeing with the statement of Wilckens that the

49. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 157f.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

53. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 157.

55. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 233ff.

57. Cf. *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, p. 54.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

52. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 154f.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 247f.

line to Jesus' teaching is not direct from the Old Testament, but rather undergoes a transformation (*Umbildung*) in Jesus. Wilckens cites, however, only the deviation of Jesus from contemporary Judaism, whereas the line that he finds in Jesus appears to come directly from the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition of the Old Testament, perhaps through John the Baptist. So Pannenberg finally returns to his initial position, that the resurrection is to be understood not from Jesus, but "from the apocalyptic expectation."<sup>58</sup>

Pannenberg's position appears also to have inner problems, quite apart from its adequacy as an interpretation of traditional Christian symbols. I refer particularly to his hermeneutics, which is summed up in the conception of the "melting of the horizons." This concept, if it does anything more than identify the hermeneutic question, points to a solution which Pannenberg does not see, or at least is very reluctant to acknowledge. He insists on beginning with history as such, so as to let the facts speak for themselves; he would avoid a hermeneutic in the sense of an *a priori* understanding or pre-understanding of the fact. For this reason he rejects traditional views of the Spirit or of faith as a presupposition, and in his understanding of the three-fold form of the word he does not include—as does Barth, for example—the word of the church. Yet he does not succeed in avoiding a hermeneutic, for in fact he accepts the Old Testament prophetic understanding, as modified and universalized by apocalypticism, as the key—as the pre-understanding which is necessary if we are to grasp the meaning of the Jesus-fact. The dialectic of law and promise, the constant movement from past to future which is witnessed by the prophets and confirmed by apocalyptic, is in no significant way modified by the fact of Jesus, a fact which the Old Testament pre-understanding cannot really accommodate.

But whether or not Pannenberg's method is hermeneutical, it is clear that his primary interest is in the fact as word or speech. Something "happens" in biblical history only as it "says" something about God. In this respect the event of revelation is a word-event. I have already cited Pannenberg's understanding of the role of fantasy and word in the movement of the present from past to future. Jesus is the word, in the sense that the prophetic-apocalyptic view of the Old Testament is universalized and authorized once for all in the kerygmatic word of resurrection. Rather circuitously, Pannenberg seems to have arrived at the position of the so-called new hermeneutic of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, which similarly understands revelation, not as a mythological event in the past (Barth), or as an eschatological event of the present (Bultmann), but as a meeting of past and present in a "word-event." Pannenberg would understand this event as a "melting of the horizons," but the charge might rightly be made that an adequate articulation of this meeting demands a hermeneutic of the word, the "new hermeneutic." In other words, has Pannenberg more than stated the problem? He has transformed traditional symbols to the dissatisfaction of

58. "Nachwort zur zweiten Auflage," Wolfhart Pannenberg (ed.), *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963), p. 140.

traditionalists, and apparently has failed in his hermeneutic responsibility to the disappointment of the radical front. He has laboured diligently to reach the point where the hermeneutic discussion begins. Fuchs and Ebeling do not dispute with Pannenberg that facts speak; they would only insist that to say that they speak is to invite a hermeneutic of the word, which would perhaps articulate the otherwise mysterious "melting of the horizons." In any case, this critic does not understand why Pannenberg evidently feels it necessary to distinguish his position so sharply from that of other post-Bultmannians. My final criticism, then, is simply that Pannenberg does not overcome the hermeneutical question; rather, he begs it.

I can sum up all my criticisms by observing that Pannenberg's thesis is expressive not only of his concern to maintain the claim of the past in its factuality and pastness, but also of a view of God which is won from Jewish apocalyptic rather than from the Christian tradition of Incarnation. Pannenberg's God is Bultmann's "wholly other," with the difference that he is wholly beyond history in a temporal, linear, "apocalyptic" sense, whereas Bultmann's God is "eschatologically" or qualitatively other. Pannenberg's thought is Jewish, Bultmann's tends to be Greek. Consequently, neither of them is willing to speak of God—of God as such. Bultmann would reduce theological statements to statements made about the individual's own existence or history (*Geschichte*), whereas Pannenberg reduces theological statement to the sum of the facts of universal history. In this sense both men appear to operate under the rubric of Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity," which means for them (and for most who claim this legacy) that religious language points finally, not to God, but to man—whether he be viewed in Jewish apocalyptic or in Greek eschatological terms. Pannenberg is motivated by concern for the historical question and responsibility for the facts of the past, whereas Bultmann is concerned primarily for the hermeneutic question of present understanding.

Is there a solution (other than the "new hermeneutic") to this twofold problem (history and hermeneutics)—a solution which maintains respect for the past as past and provides for present understanding, and which at the same time does justice to what tradition has insisted is the primary witness of the New Testament, namely, the revelation of God himself in Jesus, a God whose history is not identical with the totality of human history? Could we not perhaps speak of the New Testament facts as "absolute symbols," which, because they are once-for-all, unrepeatably facts, are absolute and cannot be reduced to the status of instances of the universal possibilities of existence, but which lay a claim upon the present because of their power, as symbols, to mediate a real meeting between God and man—a meeting which can be had and articulated only in terms of these symbols? In this case the understanding of the past (to speak now of the Jesus-event) would be neither an achievement of the past as such, nor an achievement of the present as such, nor a magical synthesis of the two, but rather the work of God, through the past, in and for the present, in such a way that

the real meaning of history would be understood as life with God, mediated symbolically by the past event of Jesus, and coming again to symbolic expression in the ensuing events of man's history. Such a solution could be shown to presuppose a personalistic view of God, as one who could give himself to be known directly and once-for-all in the fact of Jesus, and yet also in a continuing way in the facts of faith's history—just as lovers know each other directly and essentially in their first declaration of love, yet continue to discover each other in the events of a life of love and marriage.

One final observation: Pannenberg's view, like Bultmann's, is in danger of becoming a new system of works-righteousness. Like Bultmann, he would speak of freedom as an openness for the future—a future, however, for which man himself is responsible in obedience to the law of the past. It is hard to see how this future or freedom is in any real sense a gift, and therefore a permission or "freedom"—unless one speaks of the freedom implicit in the law: "I ought, therefore I can." Does not Pannenberg remain in the Old Testament, in the dialectic of law and promise—and indeed with a finality from which certain of the Jews longed to be delivered? It is interesting that his criticism of the efforts of Gerhard Ebeling to ground faith in the moral experience is rooted in the fact that the moral experience itself, and as such, is equivocal and in need of its own foundation.<sup>59</sup> We have seen Pannenberg provide this foundation in the apocalyptic vision which undergirds and universalizes the experience of Israel, which is the moral experience in the highest degree. Is this the sense in which Christianity fulfils the law, by establishing it until the end? Or is the law fulfilled when, through the revelation in Jesus, the law is transcended in the direction of its ultimate goal—namely, divine sonship experienced in direct communion with God? Our personal metaphor is helpful here. If one admits to an immediate, personal presence which at the same time possesses an unfathomable depth, then it is possible to speak of the demand of the future which is also a promise, inasmuch as the grace and strength of that personal presence, whose mystery and depth are the very future sought, are present in the pursuit of the future.

59. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Krise des Ethischen und die Theologie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 87 (1962), 11f.