

BRIAN M. EBEL

The Pannenbergian Retroactive Significance of Resurrection

Abstract

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg the Scriptures are born out of the historical acts of God in salvation history. It is this focus upon history, most importantly from the the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that sets Pannenberg apart from his contemporaries. Previous attempts to hurdle these historical issues such as theological positivism have given way in the postmodern era to the recognition that there are few uninterpretable facts as modernity claimed. As such, hermeneutics are key to the manner in which the Scriptures are interpreted. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to consider how Wolfhart Pannenberg, an important theologian of the twentieth century, argues the retroactive significance of the resurrection is the manner in which Jesus Christ is established to be the Messiah of Israel, united to God, and the reconciler of humanity to God. It is by means of his resurrection from the dead that the incarnation and cross are established, and moreover establishes a key hermeneutic not only for Christology but consequently for the interpretation of Scripture.

Keywords: Pannenberg, resurrection, Christology, hermeneutics, retroactive significance

Brian M. Ebel, PhD Candidate in Systematic Theology at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Introduction

The purpose of this fall colloquium concerns the use and interpretation of the bible in theology and missiology. Given this subject concentration, it seemed appropriate as a theologian to consider where one begins in his or her interpretation of the bible, and reflect upon this as it relates to how the Scriptures are then utilized for theology and/or missiology. According to Wolfhart Pannenberg the Scriptures are born out of the mighty acts of God in salvation history, and as people who are part of the Way, those who interpret the bible might begin with those historical acts which climax in Jesus Christ. This approach is typical of the allegorical approach to Scripture as proposed by Origen of the early Church.¹ Perhaps, then, the purpose of this paper already has juxtaposed the purpose of the colloquium, by beginning with theology as it bears hermeneutical weight upon the bible. Clearly, both disciplines are interrelated for one cannot have theology without its source of the bible and the source of the bible requires at least some rudimentary level of interpretation. Theological positivism attempted to hurdle this issue via modern foundational methodologies that sought to reduce the bible to bare and uninterpreted facts, but what evolved in postmodernity was the realization that hermeneutics and interpretation plays a role in how one approaches the bible, and that the bible itself requires interpretation.² Accordingly, this paper shall comprise how one of the dominant theologians of the twentieth century, Wolfhart Pannenberg, argues that the retroactive significance of the resurrection is the manner in which Jesus Christ is established to be the messiah of Israel who is united to God, and the reconciler of humanity and God. In this manner, the entirety of the incarnation, life, ministry, proclamation of the Kingdom or teachings of Jesus, and the cross of Jesus as contained in the bible are interpreted through the resurrection. Thus, this work explores two options, that is (1) the Pannenbergian retroactive significance of the resurrection and (2) how this serves as a key hermeneutic in his Christology which consequently shapes the interpretation of the bible.

Preliminary & Methodological Considerations

In beginning, Wolfhart Pannenberg utilizes a “theology from below” Christological methodology that looks to the historical acts of God as opposed to a “from above” methodology which looks to the logos oriented Christologies in which the divinity of Jesus is assumed on the basis of kerygmatic confessions of faith or on the basis of human soteriological need. The from above position considers the *a priori* presupposition that Jesus is divine and one with God, and the from below position considers *a posteriori* the historical acts as the means to confirming the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. Through his from below methodology,

Pannenberg contends these historical acts contained throughout Scripture are bridged through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, in whom the apocalyptic hopes and prophetic predictions of Israel are embodied and realized. Pannenberg also argues the resurrection is a historical event which can be subjected to scrutiny, or historical-critical methodologies much like any other historical event. To this end, Pannenberg looks to the Pauline corpus and the empty tomb tradition in his systematic theology. His “from below” process by which he scrutinizes these events occurs by challenging that the resurrection is validated when it is not *a priori* disregarded and when it is considered to be historically probable.³ These presuppositions are critical for the success of his “from below” proposition, as it is by scrutiny of the life, message, and Christ-event that Pannenberg contends Jesus of Nazareth is authenticated to be the Christ of God.⁴

If his “from below” proposal succeeds, the manner in which this occurs is by means of the resurrection and how its retroactive significance establishes Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. Pannenberg contends the resurrection is the event in which God establishes the person Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, which also provides confirmation to his pre-Easter message of the Kingdom – the future inbreaking of God in the present – and his ministry which was the embodiment of this Kingdom. Accordingly, Pannenberg argues the resurrection has retroactive significance not only establishing the person and work of Jesus Christ but also establishing the unity of Jesus Christ with God. Thus, the resurrection is not only the historical confirmatory act of God of Jesus Christ, but also a hermeneutical key that interprets the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. These two elements, the retroactive significance of the resurrection as the establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and its operation as a hermeneutical key to interpret the person and ministry of Jesus Christ which provide key emphases of this work.

The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection – The Authentication of Jesus Christ

The importance of the resurrection in the Pannenbergian Christology concerns how the resurrection as a historical event provides retroactive significance and establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God.⁵ His proposal is demonstrated through legal terminology and a Greek philosophy of ontology. In terms of legal terminology, Pannenberg contends there are laws and ordinances having “retroactive force,” that is *ex post facto* force, and similarly, the resurrection of Jesus casts interpretive force *ex post facto* upon the person and activity of Jesus Christ.⁶ Whereas this is easily demonstrable in terms of law, he demonstrates how ontologically the Greek concept of essence demonstrates that from the future, it is possible to see

the essence of something has never changed, although this is only visible from the future. He claims:

The essence of a man, of a situation, or even of the world in general is not yet to be perceived from what is now visible. Only the future will decide it. It is still to be shown what will become of man and of the world's situation in the future.⁷

The important thrust of his retroactive significance concerns the manner in which the resurrection establishes the person and preceding work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the retroactive significance of the resurrection demonstrates how the logical outcome of his proposal from below manifests itself. This from below method posits the retroactive significance of the resurrection as a lens by which the cross, the ministry, the incarnation, the very unity of Jesus Christ with God, and the implications for salvation history and humanity are revealed and interpreted both ontologically and epistemologically.⁸ By means of a historical event from below – the resurrection – the divinity of Jesus is established and not assumed as in the case of Anselm, Schleiermacher, Barth, and other theologians who utilize theological methodologies from above via a logos or incarnation oriented Christology.⁹ The manner in which the resurrection is retroactively authenticative is important not only as a hermeneutical key for the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, but more importantly to the unity of Jesus with God and revelation of the eschatological destiny of humanity as they relate to God through Jesus Christ.

So, the retroactive significance of the resurrection serves in a confirmatory manner to establish the person and the work of Jesus Christ, which does not indicate that Jesus has become someone else, or someone he was previously not, but rather someone improperly recognized prior to his resurrection.¹⁰ This is a critical juncture at which the great weight of his proposal is found in marked contrast to other Christologies claiming the resurrection is a myth of sorts, the rise for Christian faith, or even Christologies claiming somehow Jesus became someone else in the resurrection.¹¹ The point of his retroactive significance of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is precisely to show that Jesus is the Christ, the promised messiah, who fits into the overarching narrative of salvation history God is at the very least co-authoring and at the very most guiding to the juncture of universal historical fulfillment in the eschaton, and which is competing among other truth claims within the scope of the history of world religions.¹² If Jesus is one with God, then the claims he makes about God and for God have authority. And if Jesus has unity with God, then the act of crucifixion which seemed to be a failure of another false messiah is rather the very victory of God through his resurrection, and the revelation of the reconciliation of humanity and the world to God.

His proposal becomes evident when contrasted with other Christologies, especially Christologies whose methodologies are committed to beginning with the incarnation or other “from above” positions. The difference here concerns how his from below methodology seeks to confirm Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ whereas other Christologies have sought to confirm that Christ is Jesus of Nazareth.¹³ That is, whereas other Christologies have looked to logos Christology and the incarnation for the divinity of Jesus, whereas Anselm and others sought to convey that the God-Man was necessary because of the human soteriological need thus positing the divinity of Jesus in the incarnation, Pannenberg turns to the resurrection as the establishment of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, for it is the Christ-event which is the central historical event from which Pannenberg constructs his Christology.¹⁴ This is the reason why Pannenberg has taken care to lay the framework for the resurrection as a historical event.¹⁵ In this way, the resurrection as a historical event is able to retroactively cast light upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the claims made by Jesus, the miracles and teachings of Jesus, and even the nearness of the Kingdom in him, authenticating him as the Messiah and Christ of God despite the seemingly glaring contradiction that the cross of Friday provided. So the resurrection confirms cross and incarnation, not vice versa as in, for example, Anselm, Schleiermacher, and Barth. Thus, it cannot be stressed enough that Pannenberg provides in the retroactive significance of the resurrection an important point of coherence between methodology and his Christology, as both are mutually complimentary, and it is in the retroactive significance of the resurrection which Pannenberg shows the authentication of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, while also providing a key hermeneutic for interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the resurrection retroactively confirms ontology and epistemology.

Surprisingly, while his proposal for retroactive significance is of critical importance in his Christology, he relegates a relatively minor amount of space within the corpus of *Jesus – God & Man* to delineate the importance of this, as the proposal is treated, in some manner of speaking, as an almost foregone conclusion.¹⁶ The retroactive significance of the resurrection is inherently part of a methodology that is imbued with the historicity of the resurrection as the confirmation of the Christ-event. While he does not provide much space to this, he does take care to answer some of the potential criticisms concerning his method.¹⁷ The response Pannenberg provides maintains many points of continuity with the early tradition of the Church and with the witness of Scripture in which Paul argues for the resurrection in 1st Corinthians 15.¹⁸ Pannenberg sees his own methodology as little more than a convention of the early church and the two stage Christology of Romans 1.3 between Son of David and Son of God. He contends the

Easter event was understood by early Christians within the scope of relations between God and the world in the context of the apocalyptic hope and promise of Judaism, and in this way, he sees the Easter event pointing back upon the life, ministry, and incarnation of Jesus in a confirmatory manner that God is revealed in Jesus, that Jesus is indeed the Son and Christ of God that is one with God, and Jesus has thus revealed the eschatological destiny of humanity in the prolepsis of the Christ-event. Thus, Pannenberg brings his Christology to a penultimate climax as his proposal for revelation as history that came at the forefront of his contributions to the theological community, as well as his “from below” methodology that integrates with his revelation as history proposal propel his retroactive significance of the resurrection. That penultimate climax is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a historical event in his theology in which God offers the revelation of the eschatological destiny of humanity and a glimpse of the final self-disclosure of God, and it is this event which casts retroactive significance and interpretive light upon the person of Jesus Christ and the ministry of Jesus Christ, showing him to be one with God and the promised Messiah of Israel.

The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection – A Key Hermeneutic of Jesus Christ

Now that the retroactive significance of the resurrection has been explored, how does this provide a hermeneutical key to interpreting the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God? Pannenberg relates that the proclamation of the Kingdom which seemingly failed on Friday had been confirmed on Sunday in the resurrection, although the expectation of the general resurrection of the dead as had been apocalyptically expected had only been proleptically revealed.¹⁹ Jesus began a new era, with continuities of the original expectation, although the expression of this new era was discontinuous with many tenets involving the restoration of land, religious life, and socio-political structures.²⁰ Thus the manner in which the resurrection of Jesus finds meaning for Christology concerns how the crucified one of Friday has been held in tension with the resurrected Lord of Sunday, and how Sunday looks back upon Friday as well as the totality of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth establishing him to be the Christ of God and one with God. In this regard, Tupper recapitulates six Pannenbergian themes with respect to the resurrection of Jesus which are helpful to show the meaning of the resurrection and its continuities and discontinuities with the original apocalyptic expectation:

- (1) If Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun.
- (2) If Jesus has been raised, this for a Jew can only mean that God himself has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus.
- (3) Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus

moved so close to the Son of Man that the insight became obvious: the Son of Man is none other than the man Jesus who will come again. (4) If Jesus, having been raised from the dead, is ascended to God and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus. (5) The transition to the Gentile mission is motivated by the eschatological resurrection of Jesus as resurrection of the crucified One. (6) What the early Christian tradition transmitted as the words of the risen Jesus is to be understood in terms of its content as the explication of the significance inherent in the resurrection itself.²¹

Essentially, these six themes Pannenberg offers show the continuity between the retroactive authentication which the resurrection provides, and its ensuing consequent: a key hermeneutic of the event and person of Jesus Christ. He does this by locating the meaning of the event within the context of its own history from salvation history, apocalyptic hope, and prophetic tradition to its embodiment and expression being fulfilled eschatologically in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God.²² This is to say that in light of the activity and indirect self-revelation of God in history, in light of the prophetic promises and apocalyptic predictions, and in light of the meaning of resurrection as developed from within the context of post-exilic Judaism and among other religions, the resurrection of Jesus comes to expression. This is why Pannenberg designates the resurrection as a “metaphor,” which is understandable insofar as it relates to the context of post-exilic Judaism, but as he claims occurs in a very different manner in Jesus Christ.²³ While this could at first glance be problematic because of potential to deny the resurrection of historicity, Pannenberg by utilizing the term metaphor, is able to express a real historical event, point to the contextual examples and partial meaning of this event, while at the same time offering nuance that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an event unlike any other event for which humanity is able to presently understand and create meaning. His understanding of direct and indirect revelation drives this. For Pannenberg revelation is indirect, open to interpretation, subject to history, time, and historical-critical investigation, indicating that the revelation is not a direct full disclosure between God and humanity – it is open to being shaped in terms of an unfolding of event and meaning. Only in the eschaton will the final and full disclosure from God be made to humanity, and the fullness of truth shall then be fully revealed.²⁴ Thus, the resurrection is proleptically revealed, and is still yet to come for humanity in its fullest sense; it is in this manner, an indirect revelation of what is yet to be made fully known.²⁵ How one utilizes this hermeneutical key from the perspective of the metaphor nuance comes to expression in the experience of the risen Christ

for the Church against the backdrop of the expected general resurrection as was previously expected. In this way, the person of Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord, and the Christ-event finds meaning for past, present, and future. Moreover, it merges salvation history and universal history, positing God to be the author of history who has through a new and unique event through Jesus Christ made a decisive movement in the reconciliation of God and humanity.²⁶

The treatment Pannenberg gives to the retroactive significance of the resurrection stems from how he sees the Early Church having understood the resurrection of Jesus as the “decisive point in the history of his relation to God,” which furthers the case for retroactive significance of the resurrection forming a key hermeneutic.²⁷ In this regard, the key hermeneutic functions by casting interpretive light from the resurrection retroactively upon the claims and claim to unity with God which Jesus made. So, while there are titles given to Jesus such as Son of God, while Jesus claimed unity with God, and the presence of God was present to those who believed his message, the titles and events seemingly create “tensions between the physical basis of the divine sonship through Jesus’ divine procreation and the idea of the installation as the Son of God through the resurrection.”²⁸ For Pannenberg, the question concerns whether or not these titles and events are exclusionary:

. In the sense that Jesus became the Son of God *only* at his baptism, through the particular event of transfiguration, or through his resurrection, or that he already was the Son of God from the beginning, from his birth or even a preexistent being before his earthly birth? Or can a material relationship among all these conceptions be shown?²⁹

While some have said the message and its revelation of the rule of God in human life was enough to make the authoritative claim that the future of the salvation of God was operative in Jesus, Pannenberg claims that the message alone is not enough as it does not bring the entirety of the future of God into the present of humanity.³⁰ Rather, he argues the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was for the early Christian community “the decisive point in the history of his relation to God.”³¹ This is a key claim Pannenberg levels in his systematic theology as it forms the basis for which the resurrection becomes the hermeneutic in which Jesus is confirmed to be one with God and the agent of reconciliation between God and humanity. In so doing, Pannenberg argues the rejection of Jesus at the cross and its reversal at the empty tomb was the purpose for the proclamation, celebration, and community called the early Church, and the early Church saw that Jesus was who he claimed to be because of the resurrection. This also provided future reality of eschatological expectation to a present reality

called the Church, in whom the risen Lord was operating for the expansion of the Kingdom and transformation of the world. Although the incarnation, baptism, and ministry of Jesus revealed the rule of God in human life, and although Jesus kept in step with the prophetic and apocalyptic predictions by making this a feature of his message, in the estimation of Pannenberg, because of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Early Church saw the rejected Messiah of God revealed, and that this same Jesus who was Son of David was also Son of God, Lord and Messiah, and the judge and hope for the world.³²

Ultimately, Pannenberg contends it is through the resurrection Jesus of Nazareth is established to be the Christ:

The earthly Jesus was not yet designated as “Son of God,” but this title was, rather, attributed to him only on the basis of his resurrection and exaltation.³³

The Early Church saw the issue between pre-Easter Jesus who “was already set apart from the multitude of other men,” and post-Easter Jesus who was exalted to the right hand of God.³⁴ Similarly, the struggle he presents is the insertion of the word “adoption” respective to Jesus being the Son of God, although to his credit he takes time to nuance this word in a manner that does not connote the same sense as the Christological controversies of the Early Church. In this way the divinity of Jesus is not something conferred post-resurrection, nor is his divinity only of epistemological concern, but of ontological authentication as well. In other words, Jesus did not become someone new, nor did the events which he performed become something different. Rather, they were established and therefore illumined. The retroactive significance of the resurrection provides this hermeneutical key that casts light from post-Easter Jesus to pre-Easter Jesus. Essentially, the divinity of Jesus was authenticated retroactively via the resurrection, and it was the resurrection which cast epistemological and ontological illumination and authentication upon the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. The importance of this is a confirmatory character upon the pre-Easter claims of Jesus concerning his unity with God and the advent of the Kingdom in him. So, while his divinity and oneness with God did not change, it was indeed authenticated and revealed through the resurrection, and this is the reason why Pannenberg claims that the resurrection has retroactive power. Accordingly, Pannenberg is able to maintain continuity with the Greek tradition of ontology: things in their essence remain what they are in their essence.³⁵

Mentioned above, this distinction Pannenberg has created between a pre and post Easter Jesus, as well as Son of David and Son of God is not without criticism. Some have made the claim of nestorianism, as the two

natures are irreconcilably divided.³⁶ This is misguided, as Pannenberg is precisely against such a claim; the issue is not how the divine/human natures are divided or in competition, but rather how the resurrection provides authentication or confirmation of the activity and divinity of the pre-Easter Jesus. In this spirit, Pannenberg contends that the improper way to understand the distinction between the two is through Künneth who indicates “divinity was conferred upon Jesus only through his resurrection.”³⁷ To make such a statement is to change the divinity of Jesus from prior to the resurrection in his ministry, and to activate that divinity only in and through the Christ-event. This position is rejected by Pannenberg who espouses the meaning of the resurrection is not in a change of divinity but a confirmation of such divinity. Similarly, Pannenberg points to even the importance of the baptismal tradition of the Gospel of Mark, and claims that while there is an important claim made here that is pre-Easter in nature, and it can only be understood from the perspective of the post-Easter Church who recognized that Jesus had been crucified (thus denying such a claim) but then raised from the dead.³⁸ Pannenberg typically dispatches his critics by pointing to the retroactive significance of the resurrection, and how the resurrection is neatly upheld by his methodological proposal of a theology from below, and how this forms a key hermeneutic for interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ which stands in continuity with the witness of Scripture and the authority of the early Church.

Summary: The Retroactive Significance of the Resurrection

In sum, Pannenberg finds the impetus to retroactive significance for the resurrection through his methodological proposal from below that looks to history as the means of doing theology. In this way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ authenticates Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, and casts a key hermeneutical interpretive light back upon the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Pannenberg utilizes the lens of metaphor by nuancing the Christ-event as metaphor in the sense it has not happened to anyone else and cannot possibly be univocally understood, and yet the Christ-event has historically revealed the unity of Jesus with God and thus revealing the future eschatological destiny of humanity by reconciling humanity to God in Jesus Christ. Pannenberg finds validity for retroactive significance theology in and through the early Church.

What then does this retroactive significance mean for his Christology? To begin, it is central to his Christology. His chosen Christological methodology from below looks to the historical acts of God as the outworking of the relationship between God and humanity and the self-revelation of God finds its fulfillment in the resurrection. This is the reason for his careful delineation of the resurrection. This does not mean that at

some point Jesus became divine meaning that at another point Jesus was not divine. Rather, Pannenberg contends in a quite orthodox manner that Jesus is one with God from the beginning just as he is one with humanity in the incarnation. In terms of the oneness of Jesus with humanity, while Pannenberg claims the resurrection is a metaphor insofar as it is a unique experience that has no other human experiences offering replication, it is not limited to the resurrection of Jesus being a metaphor for authentic human existence God longs for humanity to have as in Bultmann. Rather it means humanity comes to experience fulfillment in being united to God through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it means the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and the cross of Jesus of Nazareth have been established by God revealing Jesus of Nazareth to be the promised Messiah and Christ. The resurrection then authenticates and establishes the pre-Easter activity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. Finally, Pannenberg attempts to maintain continuity with the early Church and its emphasis upon the resurrection as a hermeneutical key to understanding the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, for it is in the resurrection that Jesus is confirmed as the Christ of God which confirms the pre-Easter ministry and activity of Jesus in history.

How this relates to the present exercise becomes readily apparent. Scripture as it relates to theology is the source text, but one cannot forget that without theology to unlock its riches, its meaning is difficult to ascertain. The work of Pannenberg on a superficial level is simple almost to the point of wondering why one would ever study his theology, and yet on a deeper level he challenges the years from Ignatius forward who claim that the starting point to Christology is the incarnation of Jesus Christ or even human soteriological need. For the purposes of this paper, this is the juncture where the proverbial “rubber meets the road.” While the messianic promises in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, one could not say that this child was one with God simply because someone else said the prophecies of old were fulfilled. There had to be historical evidence to support it. While the miracles of Jesus Christ were indeed signs of the Kingdom, there were all kinds of sages and magicians who may have performed similar acts. While those who heard the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God breaking from the future upon the present may have claimed a divine or messianic status, there are other rabbis who shared similar messages, even if not with the power or authority of Jesus. More importantly, while the Christological titles in the bible are indeed important, and the Christological kerygmatic statements of the early Church are also important, one must ask why they came to expression – was it because of the statements themselves or that something happened historically to perpetuate them? And while the cross of Jesus

may be posited as the act of atonement to satisfy the wrath of God, to put an end to the enmity between humanity and God, or to recapitulate the life the first Adam was called to live, one cannot say that the cross itself is an authenticating function of the unity of Jesus with God nor the reality of human salvation and reconciliation with God. No, in all these historical events a requirement of authentication by a validating act of establishment – and a divine reversal of sorts in such in an act – is necessary to authenticate Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. This event can only be the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which the promises, predictions, miracles, Christological titles, Kingdom embodiment, future inbreaking of God, reconciliatory act of the cross, and the reversal of those who claimed all of these acts to be blasphemous occurred. The resurrection was the impetus for the New Testament, for the kerygmatic statements, and the missiology of the early Church that followed a great commission. Again, it seems incredulous that Pannenberg would create a systematic theology that seems to be concurrent with the bible and the reason for the construction of it, and yet what (according to Pannenberg) has occurred from Ignatius forward are both the acceptance of presuppositional divinity on the basis of the logos and incarnational theologies. Later, modernistic presuppositions and methodologies undercut the very reason the bible and the Church existed in the first place: that Jesus was put to death on a cross as a blasphemer on Friday and was vindicated on Sunday as Son of God and promised messiah of Israel.

Thus, the procession of reading the bible then moves from resurrection retroactively upon the person and work of Christ, and then upon the Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic predictions. For this reason, Pannenberg challenges the dominant Christological methodologies as well as the modernistic assumptions of his predecessors and contemporaries alike by returning to the reason the Scriptures exist and the key hermeneutic that epistemologically and ontologically confirms the content therein; the person and history of Jesus Christ which is confirmed in his resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was the reason for the New Testament Scriptures, even perhaps the most compelling reason why the resurrection narratives in the gospels appear truncated; after all, who has time to explain all of this when the good news has to be shared everywhere that the future of God, the reconciliation of humanity to God, and the eschatological salvation and destiny of humanity has arrived now through Jesus Christ? We are eighth day people, sons and daughters of the risen Lord, and in this we live, and move, and have our being!

End Notes

¹ See Origen, *De Principiis, Books III & IV* for his allegorical hermeneutics.

² Dr. Larry Wood offers an important work in this regard, showing how hermeneutics are required in biblical interpretation. See Wood, Laurence W. *Theology as History & Hermeneutics*. USA: Emeth Press, 2005, 27-60.

³ See Olive, Don H. *Wolffhart Pannenberg*. Waco: Word Books, 1973, 57-58. The word “probable” is an important distinction, as Pannenberg deals with probabilities rather than modern theological positivism. Pannenberg and his objectors typically disagree on one of the following: the miraculous nature of the event, the existential nature of the resurrection as the means rise to preaching and faith, or the divide between revelation and history, leaving the resurrection to be an event God reveals through faith. Migliore is helpful to show these distinctions, written in the form of hypothetical dialogue. See Migliore, Daniel L. “How Historical is the Resurrection?” *Theology Today: Vol. 33, No. 1* Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976. Also important is Burhenn, Herbert. “Pannenberg’s Argument for the Historicity of the Resurrection.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* No. 40. 1972, 368-379. See also Dobbin, E. “Reflections on Wolffhart Pannenberg’s Revelation Theology.” *Louvain Studies* No. 4. 1972, 13-37

⁴ “Christ-event” represents a dialectical tension between cross and resurrection with the resurrection being the manner in which the cross is understood. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, trans. by Wilkins & Priebe. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977

⁵ See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135-141. This is an important distinction governing his Christology that stems from the below-above methodology he utilizes. Whereas the above to below method proves that the Christ is Jesus of Nazareth, Pannenberg seeks to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God.

⁶ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135.

⁷ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 136.

⁸ This concept flows from his theology of history and revelation. Pannenberg contends revelation occurs within the greater scope of knowledge for it is universal and occurs in the process of history. He holds the end of history is the final and direct self-disclosure of truth between Creator and creature, and given the resurrection of Jesus is proleptic in form revealing the eschatological future in the present, the resurrection as future event is able to cast interpretive light upon the past. So the form of revelation is epistemological as humanity experiences the revelation of God indirectly in history, and its content is ontological having to do with the truth of the identity of Jesus Christ.

See Pannenberg, Wolffhart. *Revelation as History*, trans. by Granskou. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, 129-132. See also Awad, Nagib G. *Revelation, History, & Idealism: Re-examining the Conceptual Roots of Wolffhart Pannenberg’s Theology*. *Theological Review* 26, No. 1, 2005, 97-99.

⁹ McDermott points to how Pannenberg looked to *communicatio idiomatum* and how this failed to show how Jesus Christ was one with God in the incarnation as the impetus for his theology of the resurrection. See McDermott, Brian. “Pannenberg’s Resurrection Christology: A Critique.” *Theological Studies*. 1974, 711. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 108-110. McDermott critiques Pannenberg for a lack of clarity regarding the relation of Jesus and his divinity, an issue

Pannenberg later clarifies in the systematic theology, as he points to the incarnation as being the totality of his life rather than any one distinct moment. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 383-389.

¹⁰ Considering the New Testament is constructed after the resurrection, it is possible to see how authority was given to Jesus in his teaching and miracles on the basis of the resurrection *a posteriori*. Jesus is Son of God from the beginning, but through the authenticity given in the resurrection which proved the claims of blasphemy by the religious authorities false, these events take on deeper meaning. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 136-137

¹¹ Pannenberg points to Ebeling and Künneth in this regard, and this writer has pointed to Bultmann, with whom the theology of Pannenberg contrasts. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 136.

¹² If the resurrection is indeed a historical event as he Pannenberg contends, and if his retroactive significance is correct, then its implications are that God has proleptically revealed the future and as such the course of history from past to the future which has already been revealed is being brought to its fulfillment by God. Moreover, whereas Pannenberg contends that the history of religions is being tested and verified and truth will ultimately be brought to light in the eschaton, the resurrection in his Christology then claims the central place. Of course, the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can only fully be verified in the eschaton, but his theology makes a strong claim in this regard for the present. For more on the veracity of truth claims among the religions of the world see, Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Redemptive Event & History." *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. I, trans. by Kelm*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1970, 17. See also Tupper, Frank. *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, London: Westminster Press, 1973, 79-81. See also Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions." *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. II, trans. by Kelm*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1971, 65-118. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I, trans. by Bromiley*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, 119-188.

¹³ See Olive, *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 55.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Johnson supports this notion claiming this was the concept of the New Testament which "slowly diminished over time." See Johnson, Elizabeth. "The Ongoing Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg." *Horizons* 9, No. 2, Villanova: College Theology Society, 1982, 243.

¹⁵ Pannenberg takes great care to delineate the resurrection as a historical event by utilizing historical-critical methodologies. This is not without contestation. Within the afterward of *Jesus – God & Man*, Pannenberg takes care to reflect upon the challenges of his critics, especially with respect to this issue. Their claims range from the ability to specify the resurrection as a historical event (Hodgson) to the claims of Jesus and its confirmation in the cross (Klappert & Moltmann). See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 401-404. Also Herbert Burhenn is an important voice in the challenges to the Pannenbergian methodology and this historicity of the resurrection. Burhenn contends that the Scriptures account for the resurrection as a vision and as such, it is impossible to claim that faith does not enter into the debate in regard to the resurrection. He methodologically challenges Pannenberg on the grounds that the historian must claim there is insufficient evidence for the resurrection if he or she is truly acting as a historian on the basis of the logic that dead men do not rise. This is precisely the point which Pannenberg claims one

must concede as a presupposition. See Burhenn, *Journal of American Academy*, 369-379. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 53-114. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 325-363. See also Hodgson, Peter C. *Jesus – Word & Presence: An Essay in Christology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

¹⁶ See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 133-141. To be sure, Pannenberg has interspersed this element within the three chapters that are central to his Christology in *Systematic Theology*, Volume Two. These chapters include 9, 10, and 11. Within the scope and shape of these chapters, the retroactive significance of the resurrection is not oft mentioned by name, but is recognizable on the basis of the confirmatory language utilized when speaking of the resurrection. Moreover, the proposal for the unity of Jesus with God and the new eschatological age, are evidentiary on the basis of the resurrection as the confirmatory element of Jesus Christ.

¹⁷ For example the challenges of Bultmann, Cullmann, Barth, and other modern historical-critical challenges. Barth is especially negative toward the historical nature of the resurrection Pannenberg espouses, claiming his position is weaker than the historical Jesus of Vogel. See Molnar, *Incarnation & Resurrection*, 264-265. Original Source: Barth, Karl. *Karl Barth Letters 1961-1968*, ed. By Fangmeier, Sovesandt, and trans. by Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981. Molnar is critical of Pannenberg in this same vein, claiming there is a detachment of resurrection and incarnation because the pre-Easter appearance of Jesus depends upon a confirmation by God at the end of history. This is overstated as Pannenberg sees this as a confirmation of his unity with God as the unfolding of revelation to humanity, not as some kind of status which Jesus did not previously have as in Künneth or the like. Concurrently, while Pannenberg utilizes the symbol of adoption, he is very clear to state that he does not receive his divinity on the basis of the resurrection. See Molnar, *Incarnation & Resurrection*, 278-279. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135-136. See John Cobb also claims that the entirety of the Pannenbergian Christology hinges upon the agreement or disagreement of his treatment of the resurrection. See Cobb, Jr. John B. *Journal of Religion* 49, 1969. See also Cobb Jr., John B. “Past, Present, and Future.” *Theology as History: Discussions Among Continental & American Theologians, Vol. 3*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967

¹⁸ This is a point made in Olive. Olive contends that the Pannenbergian position is closest to 1 Cor. 15:17 See Olive, *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 70.

¹⁹ See Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 146-147 Tupper relies upon a variety of sources, among them Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, and also Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *The Apostles' Creed: In the Light of Today's Questions*, trans. by Margaret Kohl. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972.

²⁰ In this regard, the work of N.T. Wright is invaluable as he shows the resurrection of Jesus as being set against the contextual backdrop of 2nd Temple post-exilic Judaism. Pannenberg is similar in this regard as he views it as a historical problem that fits within the context of salvation history as contained in the Scriptures and the apocalyptic framework. See Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 32-200. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 74-105.

²¹ Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 147-148. These six theses are a recapitulation of the explication of the significance of the resurrection of Jesus in the overarching consideration of the knowledge of Jesus' divinity in the work of Pannenberg. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 66-73. Awad comments that Pannenberg is interested not in “philosophical presuppositions but Scriptural

hermeneutics. ” In this regard, Awad claims his interest is to show how the cross and resurrection concern the fulfillment of history in Jesus Christ. See Awad, *Conceptual Roots of the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 100.

²² Pannenberg claims this is a feature which he follows on the basis of the importance of eschatology Johannes Weiss began and Jürgen Moltmann later followed. Pannenberg further claims Barth, despite his strong words for the need of eschatology within Christianity, fell prey to the tenets of modernity along with Bultmann. See Pannenberg, Wolfhart. “Constructive & Critical Functions of Eschatology.” *Harvard Theological Review* 77, No. 2, 1984, 119-121. See Weiss, Johannes. *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck, and Rupert, 1964.

²³ See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II, trans. by Bromiley*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, 346-348.

²⁴ See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 230-257

²⁵ See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 74.

²⁶ Obayashi claims that Pannenberg is unique in positing the resurrection as revealing the meaning of history and doing this by merging universal history and salvation history together. Obayashi contends that whereas Plato contemplated the cosmos, Pannenberg contemplates eschatology. See Obayashi, Hiroshi. “Pannenberg & Troeltsch: History & Religion” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 38 no. 4d. 1970, 402-403.

²⁷ The key hermeneutic concerns how the resurrection casts light upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is both epistemological and ontological in this manner, and authenticates the claims of unity with God, the miracles as signs of the future inbreaking of the Kingdom, and is indicative of reconciliation on the part of God reconciling the world and humanity to God. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 134.

²⁸ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 133.

²⁹ This is an important point. Whereas those who espouse a from above theology claim that the titles, claims, or even incarnation is enough to claim the divinity of Jesus Christ and his unity with God, Pannenberg claims it is from the resurrection which these are authenticated. Thus, it is the resurrection which casts interpretive light upon the other events, although he does see these events as being held in tension. See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 133.

³⁰ In this regard, Pannenberg is utilizing his from below position against those who take a from above position. It is important to realize that when Pannenberg claims that the early Church stands in continuity with this position, he sees there being a change or progression from the time of Ignatius forward. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 329-330. See also Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 33.

³¹ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 134. This is a key claim Pannenberg levels in his Christology and is affective of the manner in which the resurrection is the central feature of his Christology

³² See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 326-327 Pannenberg creates some challenge in his Christology concerning how “Jesus could hardly identify himself as the messiah,” and further claims the implications of his message and titles allowed him to emerge more readily as the reconciler and enabler of salvation through the eyes of his hearers. This, he contends, led to the claims of blasphemy and the cross. The manner in which Jesus emerges is the confirmation of his unity

with God and his message in the resurrection, the negation of his rejection via claims of blasphemy and ultimately in the cross. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, 334-343.

³³ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 134. This statement has been debated since it emerged in *Jesus – God & Man*. Stanley Grenz points out that his historical approach has been widely questioned, especially by the likes of Carl Henry who challenges that the teachings and deeds are enough to disclose his deity. See Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 180-181. See Henry, Carl F.H. *God, Revelation, & Authority*. Waco: Word, 1976.

³⁴ Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135.

³⁵ See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135-136.

³⁶ For example see Molnar, Paul D. *Incarnation & Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007, 265-272.

³⁷ This is a point Pannenberg makes by looking to the work of Künneth in *Theology of the Resurrection*. See Künneth, Walter. *Theology of the Resurrection, trans. by James W Leitch*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 114. Original Source: Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 135. Pannenberg guards against this by stating that one cannot simply disregard the methodology from above as if it were “a mistake.” In this regard, he looks to Weber who states, “No one can ascend from a ‘below’ which is somehow given toward an ‘above’ without holding this ‘above’ to be likewise at least potentially given in or with the ‘below.’” Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 34-36. Original Source: Weber, O. *Grundlagen der Dogmatik, Vol. II*. Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1955, 35.

³⁸ See Pannenberg, *Jesus – God & Man*, 138.