

THE CROSS EVENT IN W. PANNENBERG

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INTRODUCTION

This article interprets Pannenberg's understanding of the cross event in terms of God's Lordship and subjects it to a critical assessment. It is argued that Jesus' suffering on the cross is the Son's active carrying out of his reconciling office, and that it is a prolepsis of the future Lordship of the Father. This has been overlooked by the earlier studies of Pannenberg's idea of Jesus' crucifixion. These studies have focused on the human historical level of Jesus' work, and thus interpreted the cross event as a fate that befell Jesus, namely, the passive acceptance by Jesus of his destiny to suffer. Moreover, they have criticized that for Pannenberg the cross event is not related to the Lordship of God. For the Kingdom of God as the reality of his Lordship is already present in Jesus and by his proclamation of the Kingdom and has proleptically taken place in his resurrection.

The cross event of Jesus Christ is first identified as the reconciling action of the Son. Then this action is explicated in relation to the action of the Father. Within the intertrinitarian thought, the Son performs his reconciling action in association with the Father. Next, this action is construed in terms of God's Lordship. There follows a consideration of the cross event as the reconciling action of the Son in terms of the traditional doctrine of the *officium triplex Christi*.

1. THE CROSS EVENT AS THE ACTION OF THE SON

Critics argue that Pannenberg's view of Jesus' death leaves very little

room for the action of the Son. For instance, Galloway asserts that Pannenberg is too much preoccupied with the thought that Jesus' suffering on the cross is decided by his fate rather than by his own action.⁽¹⁾ Neie interprets Pannenberg's concept of Jesus' crucifixion as vicarious, penal, and pro nobis in the sense that God gave him up for humans, not in the sense that Jesus sought his death as a work of expiation in which he presented his life to God.⁽²⁾ Pinnock accuses Pannenberg of not admitting that Jesus' foreknowledge had any significance for his impending death.⁽³⁾ Although Jesus may have expected that his conflict with the Jewish authorities might result in his death, he did not regard that destiny as anything other than the cost of faithfulness to his message.⁽⁴⁾ Tupper asserts that in Pannenberg's view Jesus' execution is "happened" to him.⁽⁵⁾

It is to be noted here Pannenberg's *Grundzüge der Christologie*, published in 1964, undoubtedly regards the cross event as Jesus' destiny that he passively accepted, rather than as an active accomplishment like his earthly ministry. Pannenberg writes,

Neither the crucifixion nor the resurrection was actively accomplished by Jesus...his passion and death remain something that happened to him and are not to be understood as his own action in the same sense as his activity with its message of the nearness of the Kingdom of God.⁽⁶⁾

But it can be argued that Pannenberg's concept of Jesus' death should be interpreted as the action of the Son, not simply his fate. Pannenberg's recent *Systematische Theologie*, makes this point explicit.

Jesus himself is not simply passive in this action, for the Son is also acting subject in the event. As such, he is the Savior of the world.⁽⁷⁾

What is the basis for this argument? Does Pannenberg believe the Gospel descriptions of the passion as foreknown by Jesus and even planned by

him? But the path "from below" does not allow them to be understood in this way. If one considers the historical realities of Jesus, he can hardly have sought the suffering on the cross as the goal of his message and ministry, although he probably reckoned with its possibility.⁽⁸⁾ Following Wrede, Pannenberg interprets the passion predictions as *vaticinia ex eventu*.⁽⁹⁾

Can, then, the rationale for the argument be drawn from the traditional concept of the divine-human person? If it can, it would compromise Pannenberg's historical method within which the historical Jesus in his authentic humanity brings about his own passion and death. Without the humanity of Jesus, his genuine God-forsakenness or his self-sacrifice become unreal. Therefore, either the cross is the destiny that God laid on Jesus or the Son's action is dependent upon the historicity of the person of Jesus which Pannenberg links to his divine sonship.⁽¹⁰⁾ This is consistent with his christological principle that what Jesus does must be grounded in what he is, which is established by examining the historical reality of his person.⁽¹¹⁾

The distinctiveness of the historicity of Jesus, in Pannenberg's view, rests upon the relationship of the historical man Jesus of Nazareth to the God whom he called Father, that is, Jesus' self-distinction from the Father. If Jesus as a person is God's self-revelation, and thus Jesus' history and his person belong to the divinity of God, then the self-differentiation of Jesus from the Father also belongs to the essence of God himself.⁽¹²⁾ "The deity of Jesus cannot therefore have the sense of undifferentiated identity with the divine nature, as if in Jesus, God the Father himself had appeared in human form and had suffered on the cross",⁽¹³⁾ as modalism conceives it. Rather in his absolute subordination to the Father and openness before God in his historical life, especially in his extreme self-distinction from the Father on the cross, Jesus is the Son.⁽¹⁴⁾ This is supported by Pannenberg's conception of the mutual differentiation of Father, Son, and Spirit as the mode of their inner life, which has already been presented in his

monograph,⁽¹⁵⁾ and more substantially in his dogmatics.⁽¹⁶⁾ This can be accepted, however, only when the peculiarity of Jesus' self-distinction from the Father is justified. Whereas classical christology links this justification to the incarnation, the path "from below" links it to Jesus' resurrection.⁽¹⁷⁾

What implications can be drawn from this establishment of the divine sonship of Jesus? If sonship is a proper description of the relationship of Jesus to the Father, the whole pre-Easter history of Jesus must be seen as the earthly path of him who in a concealed fashion was already the eternal Son of God.⁽¹⁸⁾ This does not mean that the Son can be identified with the acting agent in the event of reconciliation. This is because Pannenberg's earlier works, particularly *Grundzüge der Christologie* emphasizes the break between the pre-Easter work of Jesus and the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection.⁽¹⁹⁾

But it is to be noted here that *Systematische Theologie* presents the action of the Son incarnate in Jesus as embracing, through his human activity, the distinction between the human activity and the fate of Jesus.⁽²⁰⁾

The only new thing in statements about the self-offering of the Son in this event is that "Christ" and "Son of God" not merely function as titles but name the pre-existent Son of God who was sent into the world as the acting subject of the history of Jesus, *a subject not merely identical with the human reality of Jesus* as it may be brought to light by historical research into the Jesus tradition, but still *the true subject at work in his human history*.⁽²¹⁾

This is the point which Neie and Tupper overlook. Neie restricted the activity of the Son only to his earthly life. The cross and the resurrection are his destiny. They are the action of God in him.⁽²²⁾ Tupper recognizes that the office of Jesus represents his actively pursued mission in dedication to God. However, the events of Jesus' death and resurrection are passive.⁽²³⁾

The formulation of this development is based on the conception of the reciprocal self-differentiation of Father, Son, and Spirit in the trinitarian economic action as the concrete form of the immanent trinitarian relations.⁽²⁴⁾ Within this intertrinitarian thought, Jesus, by his perfect self-differentiation from the Father in his historical life and especially on the cross, makes room for the action of the Father and the coming of his Lordship in the Kingdom. Thereby Jesus *is* the Son of God, and reconciles the world into a new relationship with God the Father. The cross event is therefore not the destiny, but the self-offering of the Son to the Father for the reconciliation of the world.⁽²⁵⁾

In understanding the history of Jesus, Pannenberg's advance *from his destiny to the action of the Son* is commendable. As Pannenberg correctly perceives, the immanent intertrinitarian relationship is not separated from the economic intertrinitarian relationship. God's being is revealed in his action for the world. In the trinitarian love the persons of the trinitarian God by their mutual self-giving participate in one another. In this way the triune God reconciles the world to his trinitarian fellowship, since this love extends to the love for the world. The earthly path of Jesus up to the point of crucifixion as his perfect self-distinction from the Father is the historical embodiment and mediation of the eternal intertrinitarian relationship. Thus it is not only the mode of his divine sonship but also the way by which he as the Son acts to bring the world to a loving relationship with the Father. Therefore, Jesus' suffering on the cross is to be understood as the reconciling action of the incarnate Son. This is evidenced by Paul's teaching that the crucifixion is the Son's loving self-surrender⁽²⁶⁾ and self-sacrifice.⁽²⁷⁾ The earthly life and ministry of Jesus is interwoven with the action of the Son.

But Pannenberg's problem lies in the assertion that the action of the Son in his pre-Easter history is retrospectively constituted by the confirmation of his resurrection. While this event is an expression of the significance of the cross for Bultmann,⁽²⁸⁾ and the revelation of the preceding history for

Barth,⁽²⁹⁾ it is in Pannenberg's view confirmation. This confirmation is beyond disclosure of a meaning that the person and history of Jesus already had on his way to cross, but rather determines it.⁽³⁰⁾ This is because the "other history", on which the significance of Jesus' earthly history is based, is instituted by the Easter event. Without the resurrection, the uniqueness of Jesus' self-distinction from the Father is not confirmed and thus Jesus' pre-Easter history must be regarded as simply his human activity.⁽³¹⁾

However, this constitutive meaning of the resurrection is inconsistent with the intertrinitarian framework. Within this framework, only the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father constitutes noetically and ontologically the action of the Son as well as his divine sonship. This is based on the understanding that Jesus' dedication to the Father in his whole life is the historical manifestation of the eternal trinitarian reciprocal self-distinction not only as the immanent and economic trinitarian relations but also as the mode of the self-disclosure of the trinitarian God. Thus, already in his earthly path of dedication to the Father Jesus as the Son acts to reconcile the world to the Father.

Further, Pannenberg is not faithful to his own historical terms. For him, there is a tension between the action of the Son and the destiny of Jesus before the confirmation of the resurrection. This is based on the tension between the human level of Jesus' history and the history of the Son until the Easter event. But, if Jesus' pre-Easter dedication to the Father is the *historical* embodiment of the eternal immanent and economic trinitarian relations, it itself establishes his divine sonship and thus constitutes his reconciling action. In his pre-Easter history Jesus as the Son dedicated himself to the Father, thereby reconciling the world to the Father. This is true of Jesus' understanding of his reconciling ministry on the cross. In the Gospels, the passion of Jesus is already predicted and even planned by the Son.⁽³²⁾ As Galloway correctly points out, it was Jesus who said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."⁽³³⁾ This historical revelation is finally affirmed by the resurrection which belongs to one of the

Christ events. Therefore the retrospective constitution of the Son's action in his pre-Easter life by the resurrection is probably thinkable in a theological sense, but not in a historical sense.

One can agree with Pannenberg that the constitutive meaning of the resurrection is not an alternative to a christology which is based on the earthly history of Jesus, but is rather closely connected to the cross. The resurrection is the resurrection of the Crucified.⁽³⁴⁾ Within the intertrinitarian perspective, however, this correlation presupposes that the pre-Easter dedication of Jesus to the Father itself has already revealed his divine sonship and constituted the action of the Son. Pannenberg's path "from below", which is perceived from the perspective of *Universalgeschichte*, leads to the mistake of substituting the noetic and ontological constitutive significance of Jesus' self-distinction from the Father in his historical life for the resurrection.

Within the intertrinitarian thought, the cross event as the reconciling action of the Son is also the action of the Father in him to bring the world to himself. The discussion of Jesus' death requires a consideration of the cross event as the joint action of the Son with the Father.

2. THE CROSS EVENT AS THE CO-OPERATIVE ACTION OF THE SON WITH THE FATHER

It can be asserted with John Macquarrie and Herbert Nieie that Jesus' death as the Son's self-offering is compatible with his being offered up to death by God the Father. Paul testifies that Jesus' death is the action of the Father in the Son to reconcile the world to himself.⁽³⁵⁾ The Father sent the Son to the world in sarx hamartias in order to condemn sin in his flesh.

The "giving up" of the Son on the cross, according to W. Kramer, was the climax of the Father's providential directing of the earthly course of Jesus.⁽³⁶⁾

But could Pannenberg perceive the passion and death of Jesus as the

Father's action? This question arises because first, the path "from below" focuses on the inherent meaning of the historical events rather than on a divine intention attributed to them; second, the stress on the historical reality of Jesus' renouncing of himself prohibits Pannenberg from seeing the passion as the Father's act.⁽³⁷⁾ But it can be argued that even within Pannenberg's scheme the cross is the action of the Father. In the historical and anthropological method, one needs to note, this argument should be historically verifiable and intelligible to the contemporary *Wirklichkeitsverständnis*. How can the argument pass such tests?

If Jesus' death is understood as the action of the Father, there arises a tension between the self-offering of the Son and his being offered to death by the Father. Christian tradition has sought to resolve such a problem by means of the idea of the unity of both actions. As Grenz rightly observes,³⁸ Pannenberg is in keeping with this tradition.⁽³⁹⁾ However, can the notion that Jesus is in essence united with God be given as the reason for understanding Jesus' passion as the Father's action? Within Pannenberg's intertrinitarian outlook, Jesus is united with God precisely in and through his self-differentiation from God the Father in his historical life and on the cross. If the person and history of Jesus is God's self-revelation, the self-subordination of the man Jesus to the Father belongs to the essence of God.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But the one who suffers is the man Jesus, rather than the Father. This historical reality hinders Pannenberg from seeing the cross as the Father's suffering. Therefore, Pannenberg conceives of the unity of their actions on other grounds, the mutual self-differentiation of Father, Son, and Spirit in the trinitarian economic action as the concrete form of the triune inner life.⁽⁴¹⁾ This is conceivable on the basis that God's being and God's reconciling action belong together because his existence is revealed in his action for the world. The eternal communion of the triune God can be identified with the mode of the trinitarian economic action. This intertrinitarian framework implies the trinitarian interdependence and unity in reconciling the world as well as in the existence of the Trinity.⁽⁴²⁾

Within this intertrinitarian scheme, the cross event in consequence of Jesus' extreme self-differentiation from the Father is the way by which the Son reconciles the world. The Father is not unaffected by the passion if it is true that God is love. Rather, just as the Son dedicates himself to the Father, the Father dedicates himself to the Son. The Father's self-differentiation is seen not just in the fact that the Father begets the Son but that he hands over all things to him, so that his Kingdom and his own deity are now dependent upon the Son.⁽⁴³⁾ The crucifixion throws doubt not merely on the divine power of Jesus but also on the deity and Lordship of the Father. To this extent, the Father shares the suffering of the Son, his sympathy with the passion.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This is in accord with Moltmann's view.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Precisely by sharing the passion, the Father is the Father of the Son, and brings humanity into a new relationship with him. It can be said therefore that the Father as well as the Son is the true subject of the history that led him to the cross. Pannenberg's *Systematische Theologie* states this very clearly.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Furthermore, the dedication extends to *Allgemeinheit*, which is characteristic of Hegel's view. The three Persons exist and act not only in their own mutual self-distinction, but also in their dedication to those who have been created. The common dedication of the Trinity to the objects of creations, a dedication whose expression is love, implies God's immersion into and participation in their passion, suffering, and forsakenness. Hence the cross can be seen as the suffering of God in his love for humanity and all created beings - "without compromising his principle, historically established, of the distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit in the essence of God itself."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Now, within the intertrinitarian framework, one can see with Pannenberg that Jesus' passion on the cross is the action of the Father in the Son as well as that of the Son with the Father for the reconciliation of the world. Thus the weakness of perceiving the crucifixion only as the passion of the man Jesus is overcome. If the intertrinitarian premise is acceptable, the

cross as the expression of Jesus' obedience⁽⁴⁸⁾ to the Father is the cooperative reconciling action of the Son with the Father in love for humanity. The Son's action does not exclude but presupposes the initiative of the Father in the crucifixion.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Just as the Son's action in the event of reconciliation does not exclude the action of the Father, the Father's giving up of the Son to death does not make the Son a mere object but implies his active working. This unity is evidenced by Paul.⁽⁵⁰⁾

3. THE CROSS EVENT AS THE PROLEPSIS OF GOD'S LORDSHIP

Tupper charges Pannenberg with not making it clear that the cross is materially related to the coming Kingdom of God, the full realization of his Lordship over the world.⁽⁵¹⁾ This accusation is based on the understanding that the Kingdom has already become present in Jesus and by him in his proclamation of it, and has taken place in his resurrection in the form of a *prolepsis*.⁽⁵²⁾

But this criticism is unfounded. Pannenberg correctly perceives the trinitarian mutual self-differentiation not only as the triune life of God but also as the manner by which the triune God actualizes his Lordship over creation through the reconciliation of the world. In this intertrinitarian outlook, the Son, by his extreme subordination to the Father *on the cross*, makes room for the action of the Father and his coming Lordship. Only in its relationship with the future Lordship of God, has the Son's reconciling action universal relevance.⁽⁵³⁾ This is conceivable when christological titles such as "Messiah," "Kyrios," or "Son of God" are seen to relate the specific figure of Jesus to all humanity and thus to its future.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Jesus' death proleptically opens for humanity the coming Lordship of the Father. It is only in this sense that it can be seen as the reconciling action of the Son to bring the world under the Lordship of the Father. The exegetical grounds for this anticipatory character of the Son's earthly action lie in Hebrews 9:28. The Son's offering up of himself as the high priest implies a prolepsis of the actual process of the setting aside of humanity's sin in the

totality of human history.

But Pannenberg faces the question: What are the grounds for taking the apocalyptic scheme of history as the only framework for understanding the reconciling action of the Son in his death? He has not fully explained this. His view also leads to difficulty in making clear that the action of the Son in the event of reconciliation is the once-for-all action of the Son to bring humanity under the Lordship of the Father, not simply a prolepsis of its future realization in the Kingdom of God. This Lordship, with which the Son's action is primarily concerned, has already been accomplished. The future Lordship of the Father in the Kingdom is the culmination of this already-realized Lordship, and, as such, is the ultimate goal of the earthly reconciling action of the Son. This is consistent with the intertrinitarian character of reconciliation within which the reconciling action of the trinitarian God presupposes the all-sufficiency of the earthly Son's action for achieving the Father's Lordship.

The future-orientated view of God's Lordship impels Pannenberg to assert that the Son's reconciling action does not conclude with the definitive sacrificial death of Jesus,⁽⁵⁵⁾ but expands to the ongoing intercession of the risen Son before God in the post-Easter history of Jesus.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The earthly action of the Son can be seen as an anticipation of the subsequent process of the exalted Son's activity in the Spirit, bringing humanity, through the gospel, under the Lordship of the Father. Pannenberg says, "The christological statements themselves arose in this way as an expression of the initial work of the Spirit in the believing community of primitive Christianity."⁽⁵⁷⁾ In this way Pannenberg overcomes the obvious weakness of failing to see that the Son's earthly action is effected in believers' present experience, a weakness expressed in his monograph which is the object of George Newlands' criticism.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Pannenberg's emphasis on the continuity of the Son's reconciling action on earth with the risen Son's activity in the Spirit after the resurrection is acceptable. Since reconciliation is essentially the action of the triune God in

his trinitarian communion, the reconciling actions of all three persons are interrelated to each other. Reconciliation is therefore not to be restricted to the action of the Son with the Father on earth, but continues to be worked out by the Spirit, leading to the culmination of the Lordship of the Father in the Son. In the light of the concept of reconciliation as the intertrinitarian action of the triune God, the working out of reconciliation by the Spirit can be seen as the reconciling activity of the exalted Son in him. This corresponds to the understanding that the self-offering of the Son and his being offered up by the Father are one and the same divine action for the reconciliation of the world.

The cross event as the reconciling action of the Son to bring the world under the Lordship of God is more substantiated by a clarification of it in terms of the classical doctrine of the *officium triplex Christi*, to which attention turns now.

4. THE OFFICIUM TRIPLEX CHRISTI

The Reformation tradition explains the reconciling office of the Son in terms of the *officium triplex Christi*, Prophet, King, and Priest.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Barth interrelates the doctrine of the three offices of Christ with the doctrine of the two natures, as does most of modern theology. Following Barth, Pannenberg correlates the threefold office of Christ with the person of the Reconciler.⁽⁶⁰⁾ As Pannenberg sees it, the *officium triplex Christi* cannot be separated from the person of the Son. Christological titles themselves such as "Christ", "Kyrios", "Son of Man", and "New Adam" imply the reconciling significance of Jesus. The doctrine is an articulation of the person of Jesus in terms of the offices.⁽⁶¹⁾

What is the basis for perceiving the person of Jesus and his reconciling significance? The path "from below" finds it in the history of Jesus. This is in a sense understandable. The reconciling action of the trinitarian God takes place and is mediated in the *historical person* of Jesus Christ. Thus the historical knowledge of Jesus Christ and his ministry is required for the

interpretation of the reconciling significance of the Christ event.

For Pannenberg statements about the person of Christ and statements about his reconciling office are remarkably different in their relation to Jesus' history. Christological assertions about the person of Jesus might be deduced from the history of Jesus, and especially his passion on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.⁽⁶²⁾ The reconciling office of the incarnate Son of God, however, cannot be automatically perceived from Jesus' history. Pannenberg attempts to solve this problem by suggesting another history hidden behind the human historical work and destiny of Jesus—the history as the medium of the eternal Son of God and the active presence of the exalted Lord through the apostolic proclamation. Only this other history makes it possible to perceive the human history of Jesus as the reconciling action of the Son which is aimed no longer at the people of God of the old covenant but at the reconciliation of humanity.⁽⁶³⁾

Otherwise, if statements about the mediatorial office of the incarnate Son are interpreted only in the light of Jesus' human history, as presented in *Grundzuge der Christologie*,⁽⁶⁴⁾ a problem rises because the earthly history of Jesus cannot be seen as the Son's executing of his reconciling office. The cross remains only Jesus' fate, not the self-offering of the Son.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Further, as Neie observes,⁽⁶⁶⁾ in his earthly existence Jesus was neither a king nor a priest nor, in the strict sense, a prophet.⁽⁶⁷⁾ First, Jesus' coming and his activity were not prophetic in character,⁽⁶⁸⁾ though he was in the prophetic tradition. His concern was exclusively with God and his future, not this or that event in the historical future.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The future had broken in through him and through his ministry. He was therefore distinct from the prophets. Second, during his earthly ministry Jesus neither sought nor practiced the *munus regnum*.⁽⁷⁰⁾ His royal office began only after the resurrection, not with the pre-Easter history. "The title of King (Christ) . . . designates the position that is due to Jesus because of his resurrection, first of all with regard to the eschatological future, but then also as a present reality in heaven."⁽⁷¹⁾ Third, Jesus did not exercise his

priestly office on earth. The Reformation doctrine of the priestly office consists of *satisfactio* and *intercessio*. Whereas the former is a result of Jesus' active fulfillment of the law and his suffering on the cross, the latter is his intercession for believers before the Father on the basis of the satisfaction accomplished on the cross. However, since *intercessio* is a priestly function of the exalted Christ, only the act of *satisfactio* belongs to his pre-Easter history. The doctrine of Jesus' priestly office has two New Testament roots, namely, the explicit designation of Jesus as High Priest and the concept of his death on the cross as the atonement for our sins.⁽⁷²⁾ Since the sacrificial idea easily carries with it the idea of priesthood, Hebrews developed the unique idea that Jesus in his person was both priest and sacrifice.⁽⁷³⁾ This relationship of the idea of atonement to the concept of sacrifice, however, according to Pannenberg, is not found in the earliest Christian understanding of the cross, but can be traced to Hellenistic-Jewish Christianity which is attested by Paul.⁽⁷⁴⁾ It is to be noted here that God the Father himself was the priest in this sacrificial event on the cross. This implies that the cross was not a part of Jesus' *work*,⁽⁷⁵⁾ but the fate that he had to endure. Pannenberg, accordingly, pays tribute to E. Lohse who articulates the origins of the Palestinian concept of Jesus' death.

Christ's atoning death did not first have to create the gracious God, as was true with the pious of late Judaism who went to death in order to pay off the debts of the people and turn away the wrath of God. Rather, Christ's atoning death presupposes the gracious God who had offered up the Christ in order that he would carry the punishment of sin for us.⁽⁷⁶⁾

The Pauline writings, with Christ as the subject of the offering unto death,⁽⁷⁷⁾ are therefore to be understood in the light of his exaltation and even from the standpoint of the sending of the Son in the flesh,⁽⁷⁸⁾ rather

than the pre-Easter Jesus himself.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Further, the historical figure of Jesus on earth is supported by Pannenberg's view of the resurrection as constitutively *ontological*, as well as *noetical*. The Easter event is not only constitutive for the perception of Jesus' divinity, but is also ontologically constitutive for that divinity. "Apart from the resurrection from the dead, Jesus would not be God."⁽⁸⁰⁾ What does this imply? It is that the pre-Easter history of Jesus is the history of the man Jesus. While Ritschl stresses Jesus' "calling" as an ongoing process for setting up the ethical community of the Kingdom of God among humans,⁽⁸¹⁾ Pannenberg in his *Grundzüge der Christologie* restricted it to the pre-Easter work, and thus did not relate it to the cross and the resurrection. This implies that the reconciling in the crucifixion must be ascribed to the work of God, not the Son. This is why Pannenberg charged the Reformers in their doctrine of the *munus triplex Christi* with seeing the divine-human person of Christ as the bearer of the threefold office, thereby bypassing the historical reality of Jesus.⁽⁸²⁾

But his *Systematische Theologie* presents an advance in articulating this. The action of the Son extends to the cross and the Easter event because "the thought of the divine sonship of Jesus means not only incarnation but also an activity of the Son in the history of Jesus".⁽⁸³⁾ Following von Frank, Pannenberg maintains that the New Testament speaks mostly of an action of the Son of God in the history of Jesus.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Further, the reconciling action of the incarnate Son is not limited to the earthly history of Jesus, but extends to events after the resurrection because Jesus is perceived as the exalted Son even in the post-Easter history. The limitation of his monograph, articulating the three offices of Christ only in terms of the work of the earthly Jesus, is thus overcome. This forces Pannenberg to revise the chiefly negative criticism of the older Protestant doctrine of Christ's mediatorial office.⁽⁸⁵⁾

However, the older dogmatics, in Pannenberg's view, conceive of the activity of the exalted Lord as Priest, King, and Prophet simply from the viewpoint of a phase of Christ's mediatorial office that objectively follows

his earthly history, thereby being subject to “the one-sidedly christological objectivism”.⁽⁸⁶⁾ This is, Pannenberg criticizes, not in keeping with the content of the earthly history of Jesus because the doctrine does not link together the three different levels of meaning in the early church’s statements about Christ’s reconciling action. He rather articulates the *munus triplex Christi* in the interconnectedness of Jesus’ earthly activity and that of the risen Son which is based on the interrelation of the three levels of the divine sonship of Jesus.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The priestly office lies in the self-offering of the Son on the cross and the heavenly intercession of the risen Son for believers. The kingly office is present in a veiled form in the earthly appearance of Jesus, and, after the exaltation, rests upon his ruling over the world by the word of the gospel and the power of the Spirit, preparing for the coming Lordship of the Father in the world.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The prophetic office is exercised in Jesus’ proclamation of the imminence of the future realization of the deity and Lordship of the Father. The office did not end with his earthly history, but is still exercised by the exalted Son himself through the proclamation of the gospel by the church.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The three offices of Christ are therefore correlated to each other, not three equal parts of a whole. As Stanley Grenz observes,⁽⁹⁰⁾ they are aspects of the reconciling activity of the one person, the earthly and exalted Son in the whole history of Jesus, hence, one threefold reconciling office. This is a consequence of the intertrinitarian character of reconciliation which implies the unity of the earthly reconciling action of the Son with that of the risen Son in the Spirit.

But Pannenberg’s criticism that the Reformation doctrine perceives the three offices as divisible elements is not convincing. In the older doctrine, especially in Calvin, the three offices are interrelated, not separated. They are closely connected to Christ’s saving work, rather than being treated as an abstract doctrine or a principle in themselves. They are three aspects of one redemptive work of the Redeemer. Therefore, Pannenberg’s conception of the threefold reconciling office of the Son can be said to be a modified

form of the traditional doctrine of the *munus triplex Christi*.⁽⁹¹⁾

The articulation of the Son's reconciling office in terms of the interrelation of the three offices of Christ is Pannenberg's contribution. As Frank correctly points out,⁽⁹²⁾ these offices are logically divisive but organically interrelated elements that are directed to the reconciliation of the world. Hence they must be seen as the three aspects of the one reconciling office of the Son. The Son's prophetic office functions to proclaim, through the apostolic ministry of the Church, his self-offering to the Father on the cross, thereby leading humanity into the realm of his Lordship, as he had already made it present to believers in his earthly ministry.

However, the threefold reconciling office of the Son, in Pannenberg's view, is established only when it is confirmed by Jesus' resurrection. This is because the other history of Jesus, which is seen as the basis of his reconciling significance, is instituted by the event. Thus until the confirmation there is a tension between the human history of Jesus and the threefold reconciling office of the Son. But this tension is not true of the intertrinitarian character of reconciliation and the historical revelation. This problem forces one to contend that the threefold reconciling office of the Son is perceived even in Jesus' historical life and his passion on the cross. He manifested himself as the one who has authority over all things in the world. He forgave sins. The passion was already predicted and even planned by the Son.⁽⁹³⁾ Jesus knew the significance of his reconciling ministry on the cross.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Paul teaches the exaltation of Christ on the basis of his voluntary humiliation and death.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Further, the earthly history of Jesus as the expression of his subordination to the Father reveals his own eternal sonship.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of the cross event has concentrated on the argument that it is the executing by the Son of his reconciling office. As a consideration has shown, Pannenberg can be applauded in that within the intertrinitarian

framework he perceives Jesus' death as the reconciling action of the Son. Jesus by his perfect self-distinction from the Father on the cross makes room for the action of the Father and the coming of his Lordship. Thereby he is the Son of God and reconciles the world to him. In this way the Father dedicates himself to the Son, and thus participates in the suffering of the Son. Jesus' offering that is being offered up to death by the Father is the reconciling action of the Son to bring the world under the future Lordship of God as the destiny of humanity. Within the intertrinitarian framework, the earthly action of the Son extends to the activity of the risen Son in the Spirit. These two are the one and the same action of the Son. Hence the traditional three offices of Christ can be seen as the three aspects of the one reconciling action of the Son in the whole history of Jesus including his post-Easter history.

But Pannenberg's intertrinitarian concept of the Son's reconciling action is still inconsistent with the intertrinitarian framework at the following points. First, his view of the retrospective confirmation of this action by his resurrection leaves a noetical and ontological tension between the human level of Jesus' history and the history of the Son before the Easter event. Within the intertrinitarian perspective, the earthly subordination of Jesus to the Father and his Lordship is the historical mediation of the Son's action. Thus, it is the way by which the Son openly performs his reconciling office to bring the world under the Lordship of the Father even before Jesus' resurrection, rather than only in a concealed fashion. From this standpoint, the threefold office of Christ can be perceived as the action of the Son even in the pre-Easter history of Jesus.

Second, his concept of the Son's reconciling action on the cross only as a prolepsis of the coming Lordship of God undermines its all-sufficiency for the establishment of God's Lordship. Within the intertrinitarian framework, the cross is the once-for-all reconciling action of the Son to lead humanity to the Lordship of God. Jesus' dedication to the Father and his Lordship is the historical mediation of the eternal intertrinitarian action of the trinitarian

God to achieve his Lordship, which had already been realized in eternity, in the world. Thus the cross event has already brought about this Lordship. The future Lordship of God is its culmination.

Notes:

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- (1) See Allan D. Galloway, *Wolfhart Pannenberg* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 124 and 127.
- (2) See Herbert Nieie, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 152, cf. 168-72. However, later in the book, he suggests that Pannenberg's concept of Jesus' death needs to be supplemented as the suffering of the Son because it is exactly as a suffering man that Jesus is the Son, *ibid.*, 216-22.
- (3) Clark H. Pinnock, "No-Nonsense Theology: Pinnock Reviews Pannenberg", pt. 2, *Christian Today* 21 (19 November, 1976): 14.
- (4) Galloway, *op. cit.*, 124.
- (5) E. Frank Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 133.
- (6) W. Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1970, 245. Hereafter cited as *JGM*.)
- (7) W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Band II (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 488. Hereafter cited as *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II. Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 441. Hereafter cited as *ST-II*.
- (8) Stanley Grenz indicates that Pannenberg's dogmatics reflects "his new appreciation for the foresight of the earthly Jesus in finding meaning in his impending death", *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 146.
- (9) Pannenberg accepts the reasons for this judgement as summarised by Willi N. Marxsen, *Anfangsprobleme der Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), 22, 31 f., cited in *JGM*, 245.
- (10) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 486. Cf. *ST-II*, 439.
- (11) Christoph Schwöbel, "Wolfhart Pannenberg", *The Modern Theologians*:

- An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford, vol. I (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 261.
- (12) *JGM*, 158–59. For Pannenberg, the term “Son” designates primarily his relationship to the Father, a relationship of obedience and “mission” (Rom. 8 : 3; Gal. 4 : 4; John 3 : 17, *passim*; I John 4 : 9) as well as of trust, not his place of honour in contrast to humanity and cosmos, *ibid.*, 159.
 - (13) *Ibid.*, 159–60.
 - (14) Cf. W. Pannenberg, “Die Subjektivität Gottes und die Trinitätslehre: Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels” and “Der Gott der Geschichte: Der Trinitarische Gott und die Wahrheit der Geschichte”, *Grundfragen Systematischer Theologie*, II, 96–111, 112–28, cited in Schwöbel, *op. cit.*, 288.
 - (15) *JGM*, 158–60. Cf. 179–83.
 - (16) W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Band I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 335–47. Hereafter cited as *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I. Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 308–19. Hereafter cited as *ST-I*.
 - (17) Cf. Rom. 1:3f. *ST-II*, 439–40; *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 486–87.
 - (18) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 486. *ST-II*, 440.
 - (19) *JGM*, 223, cf. 210.
 - (20) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 493. *ST-II*, 446.
 - (21) Italics by the writer. *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 488. *ST-II*, 442.
 - (22) See Neie, *op. cit.*, 216–22, 77–85.
 - (23) Tupper, *op. cit.*, 133.
 - (24) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, 341. *ST-I*, 314. This is characteristic of a new development in Pannenberg’s theological reflection over the earlier works, which is presented in *Systematische Theologie*. See Christoph Schwöbel, “Wolfhart Pannenberg”, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 190–95, 203. A particular aspect of Pannenberg’s advance in theological thinking is that the whole dogmatic conception, particularly his theological conception of reconciliation, is formulated in the framework of the Trinity. See Grenz, *op. cit.*, 111–48, esp. 112. This development was suggested by Pannenberg himself early in the “afterword” to his monograph *Grundzüge der Christologie* and by Elizabeth Johnson, in “The Ongoing Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg”, *Horizons* 9 (1982):

- 237-50.
- (25) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 488f. *ST-II*, 442. Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1964), 348. Hereafter cited as *Grundzüge der Christologie*.
- (26) Cf. Gal. 2 : 20.
- (27) Eph. 5 : 2.
- (28) R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology", *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. I (London: S. P. C. K., 1964), 38f.
- (29) K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980-1983), 118ff., esp. 131ff. Hereafter cited as *CD*.
- (30) *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 348; *ST-II*, 345.
- (31) W. Pannenberg, "Dogmatische Erwägungen zur Auferstehung Jesu", *Kerygma und Dogma*, 14 (1968), 105. *ST-II*, 346-51.
- (32) For instance, cf. Mark 8 : 31; 9 : 31; 10 : 32-34.
- (33) Cf. Galloway, *op. cit.*, 127.
- (34) See *CD*, IV/1, 313.
- (35) Cf. 2 Cor. 5 : 18f.; Rom. 5 : 10.
- (36) Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, Studies in Biblical Theology 50 (London: SCM Press, 1966), 115-19f. Cf. Rom. 8 : 32; 4 : 25.
- (37) Neie, *op. cit.*, 222.
- (38) Grenz, *op. cit.*, 129.
- (39) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 485-86. *ST-II*, 439.
- (40) *JGM*, 158ff.
- (41) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, 335ff. *ST-I*, 308ff.
- (42) The doctrine of procession, relational theory, and Hegel's theory of the self-sublimation of the three Persons can be pointed to as the most important theological approaches to the problem of the unity of God. Pannenberg owes his intertrinitarian view to Hegel. In his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Philosophy of Religion* Hegel was the first to so elaborate the concept of "person" in such a way that God's unity becomes understandable precisely from the reciprocity of the divine Persons (*JGM*, 181).
- (43) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, 340. *ST-I*, 313.
- (44) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, 342. *ST-I*, 314. Grenz correctly points this out, *op. cit.*, 147. Neie also interprets that the Father's self-differentiation from the Son necessarily includes participation in, identification with, and assumption of the suffering of the Son, and vice versa, *op. cit.*, 222-23.

- (45) Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 190, 227ff.
- (46) See *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 484–87. ST-II, 438–41. Also, he presented this point in his article “Christologie und Theologie”, *Kerygma und Dogma*, 21/3 (1975), 159–75, esp. 170ff.. Even before the publication of his dogmatics, Pannenberg indicated this point in a postscript to Tupper’s book, “When a revised version of my christology... is undertaken, I will supplement the interpretation given in the chapter of the crucifixion by a discussion of the action of God in the cross of Jesus. That seems to be precisely what Dr. Tupper is asking for. Because of my approach from the anthropological–historical perspective (“from below”), I concentrated my attention on the inherent meaning of the events rather than on a divine intention attributed to them, although I did relate the historical events to the activity of God. Only after the christology was published was I able to clarify certain aspects in the doctrine of God to my own satisfaction so that I could dare now speak of a divine intention in historical events. As a consequence, in relation to the crucifixion, as in other respects, the self–explication of God in the history of Jesus will get closer attention when I am able someday to revise the text of that book.”, Tupper, *op. cit.*, 305.
- (47) Neie, *op. cit.*, 223.
- (48) Cf. Rom. 5 : 19.
- (49) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 485. ST-II, 439.
- (50) Cf. Rom. 5:19.
- (51) See Tupper, *op. cit.*, 299f.
- (52) *Ibid.*, 300.
- (53) *Ibid.*
- (54) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 489. ST-II, 443.
- (55) Cf. Heb. 9 : 26.
- (56) Cf. Heb. 9 : 24.
- (57) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 489. ST-II, 443.
- (58) George M. Newlands, *The Theology of the Love of God* (London: Collins, 1980), 182.
- (59) See *JGM*, 208ff.
- (60) Pannenberg’s christological principle, that is, ‘soteriology is a function of christology’ indicates this implicitly. Cf. *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 441–42. ST-II, 398–99. *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 32–34. *JGM*,

38ff.

- (61) Pannenberg's criticism that the theologians, especially Peter Lombard, separated Christ's work from his person is justified. See Peter Lombard, *Sent.* 3. 16. 6f.; Leo I (DS § 293), cited in *ST-II*, 444. For Pannenberg, Augustine, Latin Scholasticism, and Calvin differentiated Christ's office as Mediator from his identity. But Pannenberg's criticism of Calvin's treatment of Christ's three offices is not convincing. The separation of the office from his person remains external but is not Calvin's spirit. Calvin's presentation of the *munus triplex Christi* brings together what Scripture holds together, the person of Jesus Christ and his work. Christ's saving works are interpreted in terms of his identity. The affirmation of the hypostatic union of the person of the Redeemer is also not meant to show that it is a mere prerequisite of reconciliation, but is to be seen in terms of the meaning and redemptive functions of the works which he as Mediator performs, rather than in terms of the essence which his humanity seems to conceal. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), Book II, Chapter 12. E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 61-63.
- (62) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 491. *ST-II*, 444-45.
- (63) *ST-II*, 444-45.
- (64) See *JGM*, 208-25.
- (65) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 492. *ST-II*, 445.
- (66) See Neie, *op. cit.*, 168-172.
- (67) See *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 492-94. *ST-II*, 445-47. *JGM*, 208-25.
- (68) *JGM*, 215-17.
- (69) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 492. *ST-II*, 445.
- (70) *JGM*, 217.
- (71) *Ibid.*, 218.
- (72) *Ibid.*, 219.
- (73) *Ibid.*, 220.
- (74) *Ibid.*, 219-20. Cf. Rom. 3 : 25. This is highly questionable. For instance, Mark 10: 45 strongly connects Jesus' death with the Servant tradition of Isaiah 53 where vicarious-substitutionary atonement is the central theme. Thus, Pannenberg's argument is exegetically weak at this point.

- (75) *JGM*, 220.
- (76) Eduard Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht: Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Verkündigung vom Sühnetod Jesu Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 146. Cf. *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 226, *JGM*, 220.
- (77) R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. II, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 12. Cf. Gal. 1 : 3f., 2 : 20; Eph. 5 : 2, 25. 2 : 6.
- (78) Cf. Gal. 4 : 4.
- (79) *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 226. *JGM*, 220.
- (80) *JGM*, 224. It can be asserted against Pannenberg, however, that the opposite is also true. Because he was God he rose from the dead. The pre-Easter resurrection predictions must have equal weight with the passion predictions.
- (81) Ritschl, *op. cit.*, 433ff. He emphasises Jesus' mission for establishing the moral community of the Kingdom of God by his words and works and suffering and thus replaces the "*munus*" and "*officium*" with the "calling".
- (82) *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 229. *JGM*, 223. Pannenberg criticises such a view of the person of Christ as a mythological concept and therefore inconceivable in our time. See *Grundzüge der Christologie*, 228, *JGM*, 222.
- (83) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 493. *ST-II*, 446.
- (84) F. H. R. von Frank, *System der christlichen Wahrheit*, II (1880), § 35, cited in *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 494.
- (85) *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 494-95. *ST-II*, 448. Calvin systematizes the saving work of the Mediator and the soteriological significance of his person in terms of the *munus triplex Christi*. The Old Testament presents that the Prophet, Priest and King in Israel are mediators of the Covenant. Calvin, by using this threefold schema, describes Christ as the anointed ultimate Mediator of the Covenant who restores and makes new the broken Covenant with God, cf. R. S. Wallace, *Calvin: Geneva and Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Worker, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 242. Calvin possibly derives this doctrine from Bucer [Bucer, *Enarrationes in Evangelia*, 1536, 606: 'Rex regum Christus est, summus sacerdos, et prophetarum caput.', cited in W. Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), 225].

- ⑥ *ST-II*, 448; *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 495.
- ⑦ See Grenz, *op. cit.*, 244.
- ⑧ *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 495. *ST-II*, 448.
- ⑨ *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 496. *ST-II*, 449. This point has led Pannenberg to correct the previous understanding that was presented in his monograph *JGM*, 219. For Pannenberg the church's proclamation of the gospel should not be interpreted as "a part of the prophetic office" of Christ in the sense that its work may be "identified with his without distinction".
- ⑩ See Grenz, *op. cit.*, 244-45.
- ⑪ Grenz correctly indicates this, *ibid.*, 127.
- ⑫ Frank, *op. cit.*, 194, cited in *Systematische Theologie*, vol. II, 494.
- ⑬ Cf. Mark 8 : 31; 9 : 31; 10 : 33. Pannenberg insists that from the historical realities of Jesus which led to the crucifixion it is difficult to see that Jesus sought his death as the goal of his message and ministry. Cf. *ST-II*, 416f., 438-39.
- ⑭ Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
- ⑮ Cf. Phil. 2: 9.