

Chapter 4

Pannenberg's Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus

Pannenberg's Argument for Jesus's Resurrection

Although prominent New Testament scholars like N. T. Wright, Dale Allison, and Michael Licona, as well as prominent philosophers like Richard Swinburne, Stephen Davis, and Timothy McGrew, have offered historical arguments for Jesus's resurrection, undoubtedly the most renowned contemporary systematic theologian to propound a historical argument for Jesus's resurrection is Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose rigorously empirical approach to theological questions has been widely acclaimed as ushering in a new phase in European Protestant theology.¹ When in 1961 a circle of young theologians for whom Pannenberg served as the principal spokesman asserted in their manifesto *Offenbarung als Geschichte* that revelation ought to be understood exclusively in terms of God's acts in history, they broke with the "basic presupposition" long held in German Protestant theology as expressed in Barth and Bultmann that the basis of theology is the self-authenticating Word of God which demands obedience.² "For much too long a time," writes Pannenberg, "faith has been misunderstood to be subjectivity's fortress into which Christianity could retreat from the attacks of scientific knowledge. Such a retreat into pious subjectivity can only lead to destroying any consciousness of the truth of the Christian faith."³

If, therefore, Christianity is to make any meaningful claim to truth, it must submit to the same procedures of testing and verification as are employed in the secular sciences.⁴ This method of verification will be indirect, such as by means of historical research.⁵ A theological

interpretation of history will be tested, positively, by “its ability to take into account all known historical details” and, negatively, by “the proof that without its specific assertions the accessible information would not be at all or would be only incompletely explicable.”⁶ Since the Christian faith is based on a real past event and since there is no way to know the past other than by historical critical research, it follows that the object of Christian faith cannot remain untouched by the results of such research.⁷ For on the one hand, a kerygmatic Christ utterly unrelated to the real, historical Jesus would be “pure myth”; and on the other hand, a Christ known only through dialectical encounter would be impossible to distinguish from “self-delusion.”⁸ Therefore, the unavoidable conclusion is that the burden of proof that God has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth must fall upon the historian.⁹ In an unpublished debate with Herbert Braun on February 19, 1965, Pannenberg specified the conditions necessary to falsify the historicity of the resurrection:

The traditions of Jesus’ resurrection would be subject to the evaluation as unhistorical if:

(a) the Easter traditions were demonstrable as *literarily secondary constructions* in analogy to common comparative religious models not only in details but also in their kernel,

(b) the *Easter appearances* were to correspond *completely* to the model of self-produced *hallucinations* (owing to organic peculiarities or medicines),

(c) the tradition of the *empty tomb* of Jesus were to be evaluated a *late* (Hellenistic) *legend*.¹⁰

Pannenberg acknowledges that should the historical foundation for faith be so removed, then Christianity should be abandoned.¹¹ He is, however, confident that given the historical facts that we now have, this eventuality will not occur.¹²

Pannenberg's own historical argument for the resurrection of Jesus is detailed in his *Grundzüge der Christologie*, translated in English as *Jesus—God and Man* (1964).¹³ The Easter traditions of early Christianity, he asserts, divide into two traditions: the tradition of the empty tomb and the tradition of the appearances of the risen Jesus. Paul reports only appearances, while Mark records an independent account of the empty tomb. In later writings such as Matthew, Luke, John, and the Gospel of Peter, the two traditions become inter-mingled.

Pannenberg turns first to an examination of the appearance tradition in Paul, as the appearance tradition in the gospels has such a strong legendary character that there is scarcely a historical kernel to be found in them.¹⁴ In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul compiles a catalog of appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. "The intention of this enumeration is clearly to give proof by means of witnesses to the facticity of Jesus' resurrection," writes Pannenberg; "... one will hardly be able to call into question Paul's intention of giving a convincing historical proof by the standards of that time"¹⁵ In assessing the historical reliability of this list, one must first consider its proximity to the events themselves. 1 Corinthians was probably written in AD 56–57. Paul, however, speaks from an older personal knowledge. We know from Galatians 1.18 that Paul was in Jerusalem three years after his conversion in AD 33–35 and that he conferred with Peter and James during this visit. If Jesus died in AD 30, this means that Paul was in Jerusalem six to eight years after the events occurred. He probably received the list at this time. Thus, the statements recorded in 1 Corinthians 15 are very close to the events they record. Moreover, the formulations of the appearances in 1 Corinthians 15 are not Paul's own, but are

from a previous tradition which must have preceded even Paul's visit. Therefore, the reports are very early, indeed, in their primitive form reaching back to within the first five years after Jesus's death. In view of their age, we must agree that there is good historical foundation for the resurrection appearances; because of the limited time available it is idle to speak of the legendary emergence of the reports. Furthermore, there do not appear to be extra-Palestinian influences operative in the tradition, despite some attempts to show parallels in the history of religions.

It can hardly be doubted that the apostles believed that they had seen the risen Jesus. It is here that the greatest difficulties arise, in Pannenberg's opinion, for now one must assess what sort of experiences these were.¹⁶ First, one must determine the content of the appearances. From information in Acts concerning Jesus's appearance to Paul, we may conclude that (1) Jesus was clearly identifiable as the one who appeared; (2) Paul saw a spiritual, not an earthly, body; (3) the appearance came from heaven; (4) the appearance may have involved luminary brightness; and (5) the appearance was accompanied by an auditory element. Second, as to the character and mode of the appearance, it seems that it was a vision not perceptible to standers-by. This does not mean, Pannenberg hastens to add, that it was necessarily imaginary. The early church clearly distinguished ecstatic visions of Christ from a fundamental encounter with the risen Jesus. And the psychiatric concept of vision, usually derived from a study of mentally ill persons, cannot be shown to have a relevant point of contact in this case. Third, attempts to explain the appearances of Jesus as hallucinations induced by prior mental or historical presuppositions of the witnesses also fail: (1) the appearances were not the result of the disciples' faith, but *vice versa*; (2) the number and temporal distribution of the appearances belie the subjective vision hypothesis. In light of these arguments, the resurrection of Jesus should be affirmed to be a historical event in the sense that Jesus revealed himself in visions to particular men at particular times and places.¹⁷

Pannenberg next turns his attention to the second strand of Easter tradition, that of the empty tomb.¹⁸ Among the general arguments for the historical trustworthiness of the empty tomb tradition is the fact that it would have been impossible for the disciples to have proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem had the tomb not been empty. Textual analysis, even if it shows the gospel accounts to be largely legendary, cannot overturn the fact that the proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem could only have been possible if it was a well-known fact that Jesus's corpse was no longer to be found in the tomb. The objection that Jesus's body had been placed in an unknown grave and was thus not to be found is without foundation, for all the traditions—and even the Jewish polemic—point against such a speculation. Early anti-Christian Jewish polemic never denied that Jesus's grave was empty.

Pannenberg argues further that the return of the disciples to Galilee, where the appearances occurred, took place independently of the discovery of the empty tomb, for: (1) they would have had to go home eventually in any case; (2) the independent strands of tradition of appearances and of the empty tomb support this; (3) the disciples are not present during the execution; (4) neither do they play any role in the burial; (5) in the oldest strands of tradition the disciples did not show any concern for the empty tomb. The upshot of this, says Pannenberg, is that because the two traditions are independent yet complementary, the resurrection of Jesus appears to be “historically very probable, and that always means in historical inquiry that it is to be presupposed until contrary evidence appears.”¹⁹ Pannenberg stresses that if the origins of Christianity are to be historically explained, then judgement on the historicity of the resurrection cannot simply be suspended. The historical method obliges us to choose the explanation which most satisfactorily accounts for all the facts involved—which in this case is that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

But granted that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, of what significance is this fact? Here Pannenberg has doggedly insisted that the significance or what he calls “meaning” of any event is given nowhere else than in the event itself or rather in the context of events surrounding any given event.²⁰ The historian does not impose meaning on the facts, which silently await their interpretation; rather, “The events of history speak their own language, the language of facts; however this language is understandable only in the context . . . in which the events occur.”²¹ The ultimate meaning of any event could only be seen from the perspective of the whole of history after it had run its course,²² but in the meantime the provisional meaning of an event may be determined through an examination of the nexus of events (*Geschehenszusammenhang*) in which an event occurs and of the history of transmission of traditions (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*) which provides the conceptual framework that determined how the contemporaries of the given event would understand it.²³ Thus, one does not seek to discover the meaning of Jesus’s resurrection as an isolated event; rather it must be seen in relation to the whole of Jesus’s life, claims, and ministry and to the history of Israel preceding it, to Jewish traditions and expectations.²⁴ When this is done, the inherent meaning of the resurrection will appear, for, explains Pannenberg,

. . . the Christ-event is not value neutral in itself; it does not have first to be clothed with this or that meaning by a kerygma different from itself. Rather the Christ event has its meaning in itself. Like any other event, however, it can only have this if it is understood within the nexus of events to which it originally belongs, and is not artificially removed from this context as ‘isolated fact.’ . . . When referred to the nexus of events in which it originally stood—which includes the Jewish eschatological expectations at the time of Jesus, together with their Old Testament background, and above all the ministry and message of Jesus himself—the event of Jesus’ resurrection and, in retrospect, crucifixion

bears its meaning in itself. It thus makes it possible to understand and even to verify the explication of the inherent meaning of this event in the history of the transmission of tradition in primitive Christianity.²⁵

Pannenberg proceeds to unfold six aspects of the “immediate inherent significance of Jesus’ resurrection:”²⁶ (1) Jesus’s resurrection signifies that the end of the world has begun. The resurrection of the dead was understood in Jewish apocalypticism to occur at the end of human history. Thus, Jesus’s resurrection was naturally understood in those terms by his disciples, who consequently regarded the general resurrection of the dead and the end of the world as imminent.²⁷ (2) Jesus’s resurrection indicates to Jews that God has confirmed Jesus’s pre-Easter activity. During his lifetime Jesus had made claims to the authority through which he had put himself in the place of God. The Jews instigated Jesus’s execution because of this blasphemy; but his resurrection vindicates the claims that he had made for himself.²⁸ (3) Jesus’s resurrection revealed him to be the apocalyptic Son of Man. Jesus never identified himself as the Son of Man, who would come from heaven to judge the peoples at the end of the world, although he claimed a similar function. But after his resurrection, Jesus was expected to return from heaven at the close of the age, and hence a distinction between him and the Son of Man became superfluous. So, Jesus moved into the role of this eschatological figure. (4) Jesus’s resurrection, understood as the beginning of the end of the world, means that God is ultimately revealed in Jesus. Only at the finish of history will God be revealed to be Sovereign over all creation. But in Jesus the end of history has, as it were, happened *in advance*; it provides a glimpse of things to come. Thus, in this event God is revealed as at the end but before the end, i.e. it is a *prolepsis*. (5) Jesus’s resurrection motivated the mission to the Gentiles. Although not inherent in the resurrection

itself, this is a necessary secondary implication, once it was seen that Jesus, as a result of his resurrection, is the exalted Lord of all nations. Jesus's crucifixion was understood in light of the resurrection to have taken away the curse of the law and opened the possibility of salvation to the Gentiles. (6) Jesus's resurrection appearances and words have unity of meaning. The words and event express the same content; that is to say, the words of the risen Jesus add nothing new to the significance of the event, but simply verbalize it.

Thus, Pannenberg concludes, the resurrection of Jesus was not a dumb fact without meaning. "But that event had its own meaning within its sphere in the history of traditions: the beginning of the end, the confirmation and exaltation of Jesus by God himself, the ultimate demonstration of the divinity of Israel's God as the one God of all men."²⁹ God has proved his deity in the language of facts.³⁰ Because this historical revelation is universal, not private, it is open to anyone who has eyes to see.³¹ Pannenberg acknowledges that the results of historical investigation always retain a degree of uncertainty, but nevertheless through this "precarious and provisional" way a knowledge of the truth of Christianity is possible.³² Only this approach can establish Christianity's truth claim over against the subjectivism of modern theology. The facts are reliable, and therefore we can place our faith, our life, and our future on them.³³

Pannenberg's empirical approach to Christological questions thus marked a radical break with theretofore prevailing thought in German theology, especially with regard to Jesus' resurrection.³⁴ Pannenberg, wrote Geoffrey Turner, is the only German theologian today with a cogent alternative to Bultmann.³⁵ Thus the historical argument for the resurrection of Jesus, after being seriously neglected for more than a century, seems to be winning again an appreciation of its important role in justifying the truth of the Christian faith.

Assessment of Pannenberg's Argument

Pannenberg's case for the resurrection of Jesus divides conveniently, as I have explicated it, into three stages: (1) the epistemological underpinnings, (2) the historical-critical investigation, and (3) the theological interpretation. I should like to make some critical comments on each of these in turn.

The Epistemological Underpinnings

It is to Pannenberg's credit that he has discerned the fatal flaw in the Barth/Bultmann approach to the resurrection and forcefully protested against it. He is certainly correct that both these approaches are overly subjective and risk in their depreciation of the historical foundations of Christian faith reducing it to an untestable hypothesis which can be embraced only by an arational commitment. But one wonders if Pannenberg on his side has not over-reacted in the opposite direction. He contends that the truth of the Christian faith can be determined *only* through objective methods of investigation. Hence, he writes,

If we do not have to reckon with a second way to reliable knowledge of the past alongside that of historical-critical research, and if, on the other hand, the Christian faith lives from a real past event then the consequence . . . follows that for us the object of faith as such cannot remain untouched by the results of historical-critical research.

. . . Given the thesis that revelation is contained in a historical event of the past, and that there is no other mode of access to a past event than historical research, would it not be the case that the burden of proof that God had revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth would fall upon the historian? This requirement . . . can in fact hardly be avoided.³⁶

This conclusion rests on two assumptions: (1) that Christian faith is based on historical events and (2) that the only way to a knowledge of a historical event is through historical research. But while the first assumption is certainly correct, the second cannot be taken for granted. For did not Kierkegaard attempt to bridge Lessing's "ugly ditch" precisely by arguing that through a personal, subjective communion with God one may know the truth of Christianity apart from a historian's knowledge of the facts, so that every generation of believers stands on a level with the first?³⁷ This is not to suggest that an exclusively subjectivist approach, which is the path taken by Barth and Bultmann, is correct after all; Kierkegaard was also too one-sided. But it is to suggest that, from a Christian perspective, a knowledge of a past event such as the resurrection is possible through subjective and objective avenues.³⁸ It is all too easy to avoid the tension between these two ways of knowing by eliminating one of them; but could it not be that the truth is in the tension and that both are viable avenues to knowledge? This, however, Pannenberg will not have. He asserts that we must determine historically if Jesus rose from the dead, unless we had present experiences of Jesus that he did not remain dead, *which we do not*.³⁹ He later qualifies this assertion to say that people do experience God today, but that the experience could be a delusion.⁴⁰ Hence, only objective, historical evidence can serve as the foundation for faith.

Contemporary religious epistemology has moved beyond the mid-twentieth century evidentialism or theological rationalism that shapes Pannenberg's approach. One of the most significant developments in contemporary religious epistemology has been the rise of so-called Reformed Epistemology, spearheaded and developed by Alvin Plantinga, which directly assaults the evidentialist construal of rationality and warrant. Plantinga has articulated his epistemology fully in a monumental three volume series, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993), *Warrant and*

Proper Function (1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). This is obviously not the place for an exposition of Plantinga's religious epistemology.⁴¹ Suffice it to say that on Plantinga's view when a person is informed of the great truths of the gospel, the Holy Spirit produces in him, if he is willing, assent to these truths. The internal instigation of the Holy Spirit is therefore "a source of belief, a cognitive process that produces in us belief in the main lines of the Christian story."⁴² In Plantinga's view, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is the close analogue of a cognitive faculty in that it too is a belief-forming "mechanism." As such, the beliefs formed by this process meet the conditions for warrant which Plantinga has laid out and at length defended: (i) they are produced by cognitive processes functioning properly, (ii) the environment in which we find ourselves, including the cognitive contamination wrought by sin, is the cognitive environment in which this process was designed to function, (iii) the process is designed to produce true beliefs, and (iv) the beliefs produced by it, namely, the great truths of the gospel, are in fact true, so that the process is successfully aimed at producing true beliefs. Therefore, one can be said to know the great truths of the gospel through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Because we know the great truths of the gospel through the Holy Spirit's instigation, we have no need of evidence for them. Rather they are properly basic for us, both with respect to justification and warrant. Plantinga therefore affirms that "according to the model, the central truths of the gospel are self-authenticating,"⁴³ that is to say, "They do not get their evidence or warrant by way of being believed on the evidential basis of other propositions."⁴⁴ This fact does not exclude that we might also have sufficient historical grounds for affirming the great truths of the gospel such as Jesus's resurrection; it is rather merely to say that such evidence is not necessary for belief to be rational or warranted.

Thus, it appears to me that Pannenberg has dismissed too hastily the possibility that a knowledge of the fact of the resurrection is available not only through historical inquiry, but also through the witness of God's Spirit. In fact, the position that objective, historical inquiry is the only road to a knowledge of the resurrection has some very unsettling implications:

1. It tends to establish an elitist "priesthood of historians" who can pronounce decisively on the truth of the Christian faith. Pannenberg more or less owns up to this and is just willing to live with it. He writes,

But historical science by no means claims to be the kind of authority that demands blind subjection. It invites every competent person to make his own test of its results. Still . . . when one cannot himself carry out such a test, the certainty of the ground of faith is not relegated to the status of a more or less arbitrary hypothesis of an individual teacher, but rather it shares in the 'general feeling of historical reliability that is created by the mark of scientific research.'⁴⁵

But since the vast majority of the human race are not historical scholars, they cannot "make their own test" to discover the truth of the historical facts of Christianity; they must place their faith—indeed their lives—in the verdict of a tiny community of professional historians. These men will determine for us whether we should place our faith in Christ, or, if we are Christians, whether we should abandon faith in Christ. Ironically, this implication may be counterproductive to Pannenberg's whole project. For since most historians probably do not, in fact, believe that Jesus rose from the dead, we ought to renounce the Christian faith. Even if this is not an accurate description of historians' consensus today, it is certainly accurate for the positivistic historians of the 19th century. Therefore, during the 19th century Christianity ought not to be believed.

Certainly, most historians today do not believe that the resurrection can be *proved*. Therefore, we are left in a state of suspense. We could go either way. In this case, if we are to believe, it can only be through a Bultmannian decision for faith, lacking all authentication, which is precisely what Pannenberg wanted to avoid. Thus, by neglecting the self-authenticating witness of the spirit, Pannenberg leaves us in the hands of human historians, which may lead us in turn to unbelief and apostasy or to fideism.

2. It implies that one who believes without having made a historical investigation does so on insufficient grounds. Pannenberg would probably resist this conclusion, for he maintains that faith may not presuppose knowledge psychologically; but faith presupposes knowledge logically, otherwise faith is blind gullibility, credulity, or superstition.⁴⁶ This distinction, however, does not permit escape from the problem. If there is no self-authenticating witness of the Spirit and a person hears the challenge of the gospel to repentance and faith, then *for that person at that time* the choice to believe, should they take it, would be based on insufficient grounds and thoroughly fideistic. For they have no way of knowing if what the gospel asserts is true. If Pannenberg is right that the only way to know the truth of the historical aspects of the gospel is through historical inquiry, then for that person to place their faith in Christ would be an arational act lacking justificatory basis. But this is intolerable. Most people in the world never even meet a professional historian, much less study the historical evidence for the resurrection. And most Christians do not know the historical evidence for the facts of the gospel; but many know the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. If there is no self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit, then we should have to call their faith gullibility, credulity, or superstition. The fact is, however, that the witness of the Spirit does provide sufficient grounds for faith, wholly apart from historical evidence.

3. It implies that a person given insufficient evidence for the Christian faith would be justified in rejecting it. If there is no self-authenticating witness of the Spirit, then a person presented with inadequate evidence would be fully justified in rejecting the gospel's call to repentance and faith. This is not to say that the evidence *is* inadequate; but at certain points in history or under various circumstances a person may be confronted with very inadequate reasons to believe. If Pannenberg is right, such a person should not commit himself to Christ. But again, this is intolerable. No one has the right to reject God's claim on his life (though he has the freedom to do so). All men stand before God without excuse. But this can be so only if there is a witness of God's Spirit to us that so exceeds the role of historical evidence that regardless of the state of the evidence one is not justified in rejecting the gospel's call.

I think, therefore, that in Pannenberg's reaction to the subjectivism of Barth and Bultmann, he has swung pendulum too far in the other direction, as is so often the case of theological reaction. Pannenberg is entirely correct that the historicity of the events of the gospel is crucial to faith and that these events are open to investigation and even verification by objective historical methods. But we must not thereby seal off the other avenue to knowledge of the events of the gospel: the self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit. To do so would in fact often land us back in the very subjectivism which Pannenberg quite correctly wishes so earnestly to avoid.

The Historical-Critical Investigation

What then may be said concerning Pannenberg's case for Jesus' resurrection? Although I find Pannenberg's arguments in the main persuasive, it seems to me that he has committed an exegetical error with regard to the nature of the resurrection body, an error that has a considerable effect on the worth of the evidence for the resurrection appearances and empty tomb. Anyone familiar with Hans Grass's *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (1956) will recognize at once his profound influence on Pannenberg when he wrote *Grundzüge der Christologie* back in 1964. When Pannenberg states that the gospel resurrection-appearance narratives have such a strong legendary character that there is scarcely a historical kernel to be found in them, he is only echoing the conclusion of Grass.⁴⁷ The primary ground on which Grass makes this pronouncement is what he calls "*der massive Realismus*" of the gospel accounts, that is, their portrayal of the resurrection body as *physical*.⁴⁸ Although Pannenberg, siding with von Campenhausen's *Der Ablauf der Osterereignisse und das leere Grab* (1952), rejects Grass's arguments against the empty tomb, he sticks with Grass in holding that the nature of Jesus's resurrection body was immaterial and unextended; he brings the two viewpoints together by contending that in the resurrection the body of Jesus was transformed by God into something unextended and immaterial. The implication of this is that the bodily appearances of Jesus recorded in the gospels must be legendary.⁴⁹ Hence, Pannenberg's argument regarding the resurrection appearances is restricted to Paul's list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15.

Pannenberg's argument for the "spirituality" of Jesus's resurrection body is based primarily on the nature of the appearance to Paul as described in the Acts.⁵⁰ The appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road is related three times in Acts (9.1–9; 22.3–16; 26.9–23) and is confirmed in its chief points by Paul himself in his letters.⁵¹ According to Luke's account, Paul was blinded by a light from heaven, brighter than the sun which shone about him (Acts 9.3; 22.6,

11; 26.13), and he heard a voice which demanded, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9.4; 22.7; 26.14). In answer to Paul’s question of the identity of the speaker, the voice replied, “I am Jesus” and gave him instructions what to do in Damascus (Acts 9.5–6; 22.8, 10; 26.15–18). The most confusing part of the story is the role of Paul’s companions: the men with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one (Acts 9.7); those with him saw the light but did not hear the voice (Acts 22.9); the light shone round Paul’s fellow travelers and they all fell to the ground (Acts 26.13–14). On Luke’s account, the appearance certainly had extra-mental manifestations and cannot therefore be called a “vision” without qualification.

Pannenberg, however, does so and states that it was not perceptible to Paul’s companions. He presupposes here Grass’s argumentation. Grass thinks that the participation of Paul’s companions in the experience in the Acts accounts is due to objectifying tendencies.⁵² Had the experience really been objective, then Paul and his companions would have all seen and been blinded by the light and all heard the voice. The difficulty with this objection, however, lies in the very inconsistencies themselves. For either Luke had a tradition about Paul’s companions’ being involved in the event or not. If not, then why would he invent them? Grass’s answer that these are objectifying tendencies will not do, for Luke does *not* want to objectify the post-ascension visions of Jesus; it is the pre-ascension appearances whose extra-mental reality Luke emphasizes. Had he no tradition that included Paul’s companions, then we should have another vision like Stephen’s, with the light and voice’s possessing no extra-mental manifestation. Besides this, if Luke invented the details concerning Paul’s companions, he would certainly have been more consistent. For anybody who reads these accounts can notice the difficulties, which harmonizers have struggled with for yours. We cannot assume therefore that, as the author of the accounts, Luke was not also aware of them. I think it unlikely, therefore, that Luke knew only

Paul's experience, and he spun the companions' participation out of his own imagination. It is likely that Luke had mixed information concerning Paul's conversion story, perhaps more than one account of it, and hence the conflicting details concerning the companions.⁵³ All the accounts agree that the companions did experience *something*, and it would be extreme to conclude from the discrepancies that they therefore experienced *nothing*. That they were not all blinded by the light does not speak against this, for Luke clearly understands this to be a supernatural blindness inflicted by God and instantly removed by the laying on of Ananias's hands (Acts 9.12; 17–18; 21.13), not a natural blindness caused by the glare of the light. Thus, one cannot appeal to the discrepancies as an argument for a purely visionary experience by the apostle with no extra-mental manifestations; the data from Acts point in the opposite direction.

Grass also maintains that Luke had before him a tradition of Paul's experience that could not be assimilated to the more physical experiences of the disciples and that therefore the tradition is probably reliable; the participation of the companions in the experience Grass ascribed to mythical or legendary influence.⁵⁴ But as for the first point, one could argue that precisely the opposite is true: that is, because the appearance to Paul is a post-ascension experience, Luke is forced by the necessity of his physical realism to construe it as a heavenly vision, and he presents it as such because Jesus has ascended.⁵⁵ So the "spiritualism" of the experience does not in itself commend its historicity, given Luke's scheme. As for the second point, Grass's anthropomorphic parallels from Greek mythology⁵⁶ bear little resemblance to Paul's experience; a genealogical tie between them is incredible. If then one accepts the general historicity of Luke's tradition of Paul's experience as a light and voice from heaven, it would be arbitrary to exclude his companions from also experiencing some sort of visual or auditory phenomena.

Pannenberg is entirely correct in pointing out that the early church distinguished between a resurrection appearance and ecstatic visions of Christ. But what was that difference? Grass asserts that the only difference is in *content*: in an appearance the exalted Christ is seen.⁵⁷ But surely there must have been visions of the exalted Christ, too, as Pannenberg himself apparently agrees. Both Stephen's vision and the book of Revelation show that claims to visions of the exalted Christ which were not appearances were made in the church. What then is the difference between an appearance and a vision? It seems to me that the answer of the New Testament is that while an appearance involved an extra-mental reality, a vision was purely subjective (even if caused by God) and lacked a corresponding extra-mental referent. If this is correct, then Paul, in saying that Christ appeared to him, means that what he saw was no mere vision, but a real, extra-mental event, even if that event did include visionary aspects.

Suppose this is altogether wrong, however. What grounds are there for using the mode of the appearance to Paul as a standard model for the other appearances? In placing himself in the list of witnesses of the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15.3–8), Paul in no sense implies that the foregoing appearances were the same *sort* of manifestation as his own. Paul is not concerned here with the *how* of the appearances, but with *who* appeared. He wants to list witnesses of the risen Christ, and the mode of the appearance is entirely incidental. Nor in placing himself in the list is Paul trying, so to speak, to pull the others down to his level of a visionary experience; rather he is trying to raise his appearance up to the same level of reality and objectivity as the disciples'. Paul's detractors denied or doubted his apostleship (1 Corinthians 9.1–2; 2 Corinthians 11.5; 12.11) and his having seen Christ would be an important argument in his favor (Galatians 1.1, 11–12, 15–16; 1 Corinthians 9.1–2; 15.8–9). His opponents might tend to dismiss Paul's experience as a mere subjective vision, not a real appearance, and so Paul is anxious to

include himself with the other apostles as a recipient of a genuine, objective appearance of the risen Lord.⁵⁸ By putting himself in the list, Paul is saying that what *he* saw was every bit as much a real appearance of Jesus as what *they* saw. Hence, to conclude that the other appearances must be the same mode as the appearance to Paul is a *non sequitur*.

Nor does Paul's doctrine of the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" imply that for Paul the risen Jesus had an immaterial, unextended body, as Pannenberg implies.⁵⁹ According to Paul the body is sown a *sōma psychikon*, but it is raised a *sōma pneumatikon* (1 Corinthians 15.44). By a *sōma psychikon* Paul clearly does not mean a body made out of *psychē*. In the New Testament *psychikos* always has a negative connotation (1 Corinthians 2.14; James 3.15; Jude 19); that which is *psychikos* partakes of the character and direction of ordinary human nature. Hence, the emphasis in *sōma psychikon* is not that the body is *physical*, but that it is *natural*. Accordingly, *sōma psychikon* ought rightly to be translated "natural body"; it means our ordinary human body. This is the body that will be sown. But it is raised a *sōma pneumatikon*. And just as a *sōma psychikon* does not mean a body made out of *psychē*, neither does a *sōma pneumatikon* mean a body made out of *pneuma*. Virtually every modern commentator agrees on this point: Paul is not talking about a rarefied body made out of spirit or ether; he means a body under the direction and lordship of God's Spirit. Thus, philological analysis leads, in Clavier's words, to the conclusion that ". . . the 'spiritual body' is, in substance, the same body, this body of flesh, but controlled by the spirit, as is the body of Jesus Christ."⁶⁰ The contrast is not between physical body/non-physical body, but between natural body/supernatural body.⁶¹

But does not v. 50 indicate that the resurrection body is immaterial: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"? Not at all, for such an interpretation incorrectly assumes that Paul is talking about anatomy. Rather, commentators are agreed that "flesh and blood" is a

typical Semitic expression denoting the frail human nature.⁶² It emphasizes our feeble mortality over against God; hence, the second half of v. 50 is Paul's elaboration in other words of exactly the same thought. Paul is not speaking of anatomy; rather he means that mortal human beings cannot enter into God's eternal kingdom; therefore, they must become imperishable (v. 53). This imperishability does not connote immateriality or unextendedness; on the contrary, an immaterial, unextended body would probably be regarded by Paul as a contradiction in terms. With all the best will in the world, it is extremely difficult to see what is the difference between an immaterial, unextended, spiritual "body" and the immortality of Jesus's soul. And this is certainly not what Paul (or Pannenberg) wishes to affirm!

It seems to me therefore that we have got to get back to what Paul understood by the resurrection body: a powerful, glorious, imperishable, Spirit-directed *body*. To say the body is physical is a tautology. But in that case, it is no longer possible to play Paul off against the gospels, for they conceive of the resurrection body of Jesus in precisely the same terms. In essence, I am suggesting that Pannenberg has, under the influence of Grass's exegesis, ignored a substantial area of evidence that could conceivably greatly strengthen his argument for Jesus's resurrection, namely, the appearance traditions in the resurrection narratives. Moreover, the conception of the resurrection body as physical will have important eschatological implications as well.⁶³

The Theological Interpretation

Once it has been shown that the resurrection of Jesus is the most plausible explanation of the facts, then the "so what" question must inevitably next arise. Pannenberg's lasting

contribution to the discussion at this juncture is his insistence that the meaning of the resurrection must be understood within the context in which it occurred. Taken as an artificially isolated event, the resurrection might be seen as a mere anomaly, without significance. But within the context in which it occurred, it takes on a religious significance.

However, a serious qualification needs to be added at this point. It is certainly true that when we investigate ordinary historical events, the meaning of these events may be found in the historical context in which they occurred. But this concerns the *historical meaning* of the event in question, that is, its significance in the historical process. When, on the other hand, we ask about the meaning of the resurrection, we are not asking so much about its historical meaning as we are its *religious meaning*. One could answer the question of historical meaning in terms of the resurrection's effect on the disciples and the subsequent course of events, but one has not thereby answered satisfactorily the religious question. In this sense, Pannenberg's fifth point on the significance of the resurrection (motivation of the Gentile mission) concerns only the resurrection's historical, not religious, significance. The first four points, by contrast, attempt to unpack the religious meaning inherent in the resurrection itself. But the difficulty here is how wide a context one ought to take in order to interpret the event in question. Pannenberg's first, third, and fourth points all go beyond the immediate religious context of the resurrection to the wider context of Jewish apocalypticism. If we were inquiring concerning historical significance, such a move would be unobjectionable; but with regard to religious significance, we are not bound to accept the truth of the wider religious context in which the event occurred. It could be that Jewish eschatological expectations were simply false and that these lent in turn a false interpretation to the event of Jesus's resurrection.⁶⁴ Indeed, Pannenberg's exposition of the inherent significance of the resurrection makes one wonder if this is not precisely what

happened: the resurrection was understood as the end of the world, which it obviously was not (to say the end occurred proleptically strikes one as the most desperate of expedients to save this interpretation); Jesus was regarded as the Son of Man, which he never claimed to be; and because the resurrection was seen as the beginning of the end, God was thought to be revealed in Jesus—but the end did not come. To my mind these are all very good reasons for rejecting the interpretation of the resurrection from the standpoint of Jewish apocalyptic. Rather than “saving the phenomena” by saying the end of the world happened in advance, it seems more plausible to say this interpretation was simply wrong.⁶⁵ And besides, had Jesus’s resurrection occurred in a Hindu culture or some other culture, would we be forced by the historicity of that event to accept the interpretation given to the event by that culture? I think the answer is, obviously not.⁶⁶

The problem at hand is actually the old question concerning the interpretation of a miracle. The traditional answer given was that the correct interpretation was given in the immediate doctrinal context in confirmation of which the miracle was performed. This corresponds to Pannenberg’s second point of significance of the resurrection: the resurrection serves to confirm the personal claims made by Jesus himself. This seems to me to be the legitimate application of the principle of “meaning in context”: it is in the immediate context of the claims of Jesus, who as the subject of the resurrection is the only one who has the right to interpret its meaning, that one finds the religious significance of the resurrection. It serves as a confirmation of Jesus’s implied claim to authority which put him in the position of God.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Pannenberg’s enduring contribution to Christology is his shining the spotlight on the resurrection of Jesus as an event, however miraculous, in the ordinary history in which we live, rather than in

some non-investigable supra-history. He has emphasized that the life of Jesus studied by historical-critical scholars does not end with his death or burial but extends beyond his death to his resurrection. In that way we have good historical grounds for accepting the claim to divine authority implicit in the message preached by Jesus. I should plead only for more epistemological balance in our approach to Christology, for a deeper appreciation of the historical credibility of the gospel resurrection narratives based on a reassessment of the Pauline evidence concerning the nature of the resurrection body, and for an interpretation of the religious significance of the resurrection in the context of Jesus's own life, ministry, and teachings. Notwithstanding, Pannenberg's emphasis on the historicity of the resurrection and on its evidential value for faith can only be heartily applauded.⁶⁸

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¹ B. A. Williams, "W. Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie*," *TvT* 7 (1967): 322; see also René Marlé, "Comincia un'Era Nuova nella Teologia Protestante Tedesca?" *CivCat* 119 (1968): 214–25; Daniel P. Fuller, "A New German Theological Movement," *SJT* 19 (1966): 160–75.

² Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (London: Macmillan, 1968), ix.

³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," in James Robinson and John Cobb, eds., *Theology as History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 131.

⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 326–45.

⁵ Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 332; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. George Kehm, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970–73), 1.78.

⁶ Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 78.

⁷ Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 53.

⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), 27–28.

⁹ Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 66; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Ist Jesus wirklich auferstanden?" in *Ist Jesus wirklich auferstanden?* (Karlsruhe: Evangelische Akademie Mannheim, 1964), 23.

¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, cited in James Robinson, "Revelation as Word and as History." in Robinson and Cobb, *Theology as History*, 33.

¹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Response to the Discussion,” in Robinson and Cobb, *Theology as History*, 274. As he says flatly in his *Systematic Theology*, “If the event did not actually take place, of course, then all discussion of its meaning is a waste of time” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, 3 vols., [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991–98], 2.346).

¹² Pannenberg, “Response to the Discussion,” 273; Pannenberg, “Redemptive Event,” 56.

¹³ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 88–106; cf. Pannenberg, “Auferstanden?,” 23–33; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:352–59.

¹⁴ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 89. Pannenberg later came to a much more positive appreciation of the historical credibility of the gospel appearance narratives on the basis of the work of John Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1975). Alsup argued convincingly that the gospel appearance narratives could not be plausibly accounted for on the basis of comparative pagan religious models. In his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg says that although we “possibly” have in these accounts a later stage of the tradition in which the details have been reshaped by legendary and tendentious influences, now on the basis of Alsup’s work he thinks that “a factual core may still underlie the narratives” (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2.354). This reevaluation of the gospel appearance narratives does not, however, lead Pannenberg to question the “common view” that “in their form the events in all the stories seem to offer visionary experiences” (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2.354). Alsup himself sought to interpret the appearance narratives in terms of Jewish stories of visionary experiences.

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 89; the naming of witnesses was the customary method employed by the Greek historian (e.g., Herodotus) to prove a historical event, and Paul’s mentioning that the

witnesses are still alive so that they can be questioned makes it clear that Paul intends to construct a historical proof according to the then contemporary standards (Pannenberg, “Auferstanden?,” 24.)

¹⁶ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 92.

¹⁷ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 99. Pannenberg insists that we do not really know exactly what occurred in the resurrection of Jesus. The word itself is only a metaphor, reflecting the idea of waking from sleep. But we can know that whereas Jesus was dead, he is now alive. His earthly corpse was transformed into a non-material condition in which he now exists with God in what was formerly called “heaven.” This translation of his body, which destroyed all structural but not historical continuity, occurred as an event in time and space, so that we can affirm that the resurrection was a historical event, prior to the appearances and leaving an evacuated tomb in its wake (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “What Is Truth?” in *Basic Questions*, 2.25–26; Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 74–83; Pannenberg, “Response to the Discussion,” 265–66; Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Dogmatische Erwägungen zur Auferstehung Jesu,” *KD* 14 (1968): 112–15; Pannenberg to Frank Tupper, in Frank Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 152.

¹⁸ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 99; cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2.356–59. In the latter he notes that the older skepticism about the empty tomb (exemplified by Grass) is waning, so that increasingly the story of the women’s discovery of the empty tomb has come to be accepted as an original part of the passion story. It is fascinating to note Pannenberg’s reliance upon the work of the Christian philosopher Michael Dummett regarding the empty tomb.

¹⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 105.

²⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Kerygma and History,” in *Basic Questions*, 1.86; Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Hermeneutic and Universal History,” in *Basic Questions*, 1.98; Wolfhart

Pannenberg, "Insight and Faith," in *Basic Questions*, 2.39.

²¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in Pannenberg, *Revelation*, 153. Of course, the clarity of meaning differs from case to case, but ". . . in principle every event has its original meaning within the context of occurrence and tradition in which it took place" (Pannenberg, "Revelation," 127). Therefore, one may not arbitrarily attach whatever meaning one wills to a given fact.

²² Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 36–37; Pannenberg, "Revelation," 123; Pannenberg, *Science*, 71.

²³ Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion," 242; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Foreword," in *Basic Questions*, 1.xvii.

²⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Crisis of the Scripture Principle," in *Basic Questions*, 1.18; Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 67; Pannenberg, "Kerygma," 94; Pannenberg, "Revelation," 127.

²⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "What is a Dogmatic Statement?," in *Basic Questions*, 1.198; see also Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event," 60–61.

²⁶ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 66–73.

²⁷ Pannenberg argues that this expectation did not go entirely unfulfilled because in Jesus the end of the world really *did* occur—proleptically—so that in Christ's resurrection we have a foretaste of the general resurrection of the dead at the end of history (Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses," 141; Pannenberg, "Kerygma," 94; Pannenberg, "Hermeneutic and Universal History," 135; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic," in *Basic Questions*, 1.179; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "What is Truth?," in *Basic Questions*, 2:24; Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 106–8.)

²⁸ In his *Systematic Theology*, 2:334–35, 343–45, Pannenberg goes to some length to argue that if we are to understand the proclamation of Jesus, we must begin with the content of his message rather than a supposed claim to authority on his part. What is central is not his person but rather God, the nearness of his rule, and his fatherly love. While Jesus’s proclamation of the inbreaking of God’s rule did not presuppose any claim to special authority for his person, still it undoubtedly implied such a claim on account of the light that the content of his message shed on him personally. For the rule of God was breaking into human history through Jesus. Offense at the message and conduct of Jesus arose out of the ambivalence into which the message of Jesus thrust his own person. There is an essential link between this ambivalence and the resultant rejection and execution of Jesus. The ambivalence was set aside only by the resurrection of the Crucified, which confirmed the claim that was implicit in his work.

²⁹ Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 73.

³⁰ Pannenberg, “Dogmatic Theses,” 137.

³¹ Pannenberg, 135.

³² Pannenberg, “Response to the Discussion,” 275.

³³ Pannenberg, “Dogmatic Theses,” 138.

³⁴ See Pannenberg’s interesting reflections in *Systematic Theology*, 2.338, 344, 353, on his work and reactions to it when first published in 1964.

³⁵ Geoffrey Turner, “Wolfhart Pannenberg and the Hermeneutical Problem,” *ITQ* 39.2 (1972): 127.

³⁶ Pannenberg, “Redemptive Event,” 53, 66.

³⁷ This is the burden of his *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936) and his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. Swenson

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).

³⁸ I hope that it is clear that by “subjective” I do not mean *arbitrary* or *conventional* or *emotional*. Rather the distinction between subjective and objective methods of knowing may be alternatively expressed as the distinction between *privately accessible* and *publicly accessible* or *existential/experiential* and *evidential*.

³⁹ Pannenberg, “Revelation,” 128.

⁴⁰ Pannenberg, “Response to the Discussion,” 238–39.

⁴¹ For an exposition see J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, “Religious Epistemology,” chap. 7 in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2017).

⁴² Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 206.

⁴³ Plantinga, 261.

⁴⁴ Plantinga, 262.

⁴⁵ Pannenberg, “Redemptive Event,” 56–57.

⁴⁶ Pannenberg, “Revelation,” 129, 131.

⁴⁷ Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 92.

⁴⁸ Grass, 16–92.

⁴⁹ Recall that despite the salutary influence of Alsup’s work on the resurrection appearances, Pannenberg continues to treat the appearances as visionary events in his *Systematic Theology*, 2.354.

⁵⁰ In his *Systematic Theology*, 2.354–55, Pannenberg offers two reasons to take the appearance to Paul in Acts as an indication of the original events behind the gospel accounts: (1) in the oldest

New Testament witness the resurrection and ascension of Jesus form a single event, so that Jesus's self-revelation must have been from the concealment of heaven; and (2) the Jerusalem apostles recognized the validity of Paul's apostolic commissioning on the basis of his experience.

It is, however, bad historical method to try to override specific evidence for an event based on inferences from such generalizations. Specifically, re (1), Wright has emphasized that the resurrection of Jesus is not to be conflated with his ascension into heaven; rather resurrection was the church's primitive proclamation (I Corinthians 15.3–5) (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 625–26). In any case concealment has nothing to do with the nature of the appearances, since, whether ascended to heaven or not, Jesus is concealed from view when not appearing, and those appearances could take the form of materializations. *N.B.* that on Alsup's view appearances of angels, which provided the form (*Gattung*) for the resurrection appearance stories, were not always from heaven but were frequently on earth.

Re (2), Paul's experience in Acts is described as involving extra-mental elements also experienced at least in part by his companions, so that his experience was not purely visionary, despite its being unusual as a post-ascension encounter. The transformation in Saul the persecutor was doubtless sufficient evidence to the apostles of his commission on the basis of his experience of the risen and ascended Lord.

⁵¹ See helpful discussion in Xavier Léon-Dufour, "L'apparition du Ressuscité à Paul," in *Resurrexit*, ed. Édouard Dhanis (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), 281–82.

⁵² Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 219–20.

⁵³ So, C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 18.

⁵⁴ Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 219–20.

⁵⁵ This is, in fact, the view of Peder Borgen, “From Paul to Luke,” *CBQ* 31.2 (1969): 180; cf. C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1970), 55–56, 66; Léon-Dufour, “Apparition,” 294.

⁵⁶ Homer, *Iliad* 158; Homer, *Odyssey* v. 161; Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonauts* 4.852.

⁵⁷ Grass, *Ostergeschehen*, 229–32.

⁵⁸ For good statements of this point, see B. F. Wescott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 93–94; James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), 39; P. Gardner-Smith, *The Narratives of the Resurrection* (London: Methuen, 1926), 21–22; J. Robinson, “Resurrection in the New Testament,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4.43–53.

⁵⁹ See Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010), 403–23; Robert Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 159–83; Alexander Sand, *Der Begriff “Fleisch” in den Paulinischen Haupt-briefen* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1967), 152–53; Jean Héring, *La première épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, 2nd ed. (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1959), 146–48; H. Clavier, “Breves remarques sur la notion de σῶμα πνευματικόν,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 342–62.

⁶⁰ Clavier, “Remarques,” 361.

⁶¹ See remarks of Héring, *Première épître*, 147.

⁶² It is found in Matthew 16.17; Galatians 1.16; Ephesians 6.12, Hebrews 2.14; see also Sirach 14.18 and the references in Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, eds., *Kommentar zum Neuen*

Testament aus Talmud und Midrash, 5th ed., 6 vols. (München: C. H. Beck, 1969), 1.730–31, 753.

⁶³ For example, though Pannenberg has stressed the second coming of Christ as a future historical event, he qualifies this on the basis of the immateriality and unextendedness of Christ's resurrection "body" to mean, not the return of an individual, but the general realization among men of the Lordship of God (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Die Auferstehung Jesu und die Zukunft des Menschen* [München: Minerva Publikation, 1978], 17–18). This re-interpretation of Christ's return is rendered untenable by a correct understanding of Paul's conception of the resurrection body.

⁶⁴ An objection repeatedly pressed by Gerald O'Collins, "Christology from Below," *Interpretation* 23.2 (1969): 231; O'Collins, "The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg," *Religious Studies* 3 (1967): 375; O'Collins, "Revelation as History," *Heyth J* 7 (1966): 402, 405; so also H. Martin Rumscheidt, "Grundzüge der Christologie," *SJT* 18.4 (1965): 489.

⁶⁵ Pannenberg attempts to justify the appeal to Jewish apocalyptic by arguing: (1) modern anthropology stresses openness to the future and ultimate fulfillment, (2) man needs immortality, and (3) this could take the form of immortality of the soul or resurrection of the body, of which the latter is more reasonable. The problem is that these three points, if true, still say nothing about taking Jewish apocalyptic expectations to be true. They show only that resurrection is desirable or pragmatically necessary.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg compounds the problem by affirming that, "The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus as the hope of salvation for the human race *beyond the confines of Jewish tradition* presupposes the possibility of maintaining with sufficient plausibility the universal validity of Jewish expectation of an eschatological resurrection of the

dead, at least in its basic features (2.351 [my emphasis]). This astonishing affirmation is not only misconceived but threatens to undo Pannenberg's whole project. In order for those who do not already share Jewish eschatological hopes to believe justifiably in Jesus's resurrection, such persons must apparently first have grounds for believing in an eschatological resurrection. This is to stand things on their head. The reason non-Jews can be persuaded to embrace the Jewish eschatological hope is precisely because we have good evidence that God has raised Jesus from the dead. It is Jesus's resurrection that founds the eschatological hope, not vice versa. If justified belief in Jesus's resurrection rests upon establishing independently the plausibility of Jewish eschatological hopes, then a historical case for the resurrection of Jesus is done for.

We need to ask, therefore, what argument Pannenberg gives for such an extraordinary and counterproductive assertion. Here it is: "Paul had already emphasized that we can reverse the relation between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead: 'If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised' (I Cor. 15:13)" (2.351). Pannenberg's argument for reversing the relation is both logically and biblically flawed.

Logically, Paul is not asserting that belief in the general resurrection of the dead is a precondition of belief in Jesus's resurrection. Rather he is making the logical point that a universally quantified statement is true of every individual in the domain of quantification. So, if I assert that "No man has three legs," that entails that "John (a man) does not have three legs." Obviously, I can know that my friend John does not have three legs even if I am utterly ignorant whether there are three-legged men somewhere in the world. So here: "For every dead person x , x does not rise from the dead" entails "Jesus did not rise from the dead." So, Paul can say, "If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised" (I Corinthians 15.16).

Biblically, Paul does not infer that in order to believe in Jesus's resurrection, the Corinthians had to first come to believe in the Jewish doctrine of eschatological resurrection. Rather Paul says, "But Christ has been raised, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Corinthians 15.20). The logic is impeccable: "If the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. But Christ has been raised. Therefore, the dead are raised." (This is reasoning by *modus tollens*: $p \rightarrow q$; not- q ; therefore not- p .) How do we know that the second premise is true?—on the basis of the eyewitness testimony to Jesus's resurrection appearances (I Corinthians 15.5–7).

⁶⁶ A point made also by Daniel Fuller, "A New German Theological Movement" *SJT* 19 (1966): 168.

⁶⁷ In his *Systematic Theology*, the confirmatory nature of Jesus's resurrection for his proclamation of God's rule and its implied claim to authority comes strongly to the fore (2.345–49).

⁶⁸ Portions of this research were conducted while a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung at the Universität München, where Prof. Dr. Pannenberg served both as my mentor and *Doktorvater*.