Above, Within or Ahead Of? Pannenberg’s Eschatologicalism as a Replacement for Supernaturalism

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Supernaturalism became the philosophical assumption of Christian theology during the thirteenth century A.D. The term *supernatural* was specifically developed and widely used by Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics as a technical term to describe God as eternally, self-subsistent and hence different in essence from the created, natural order. The term lost its technical meaning as it was more generally used outside the classroom and it eventually became more popularly understood to designate something as beyond the normal. Because of this secondary meaning, some prefer to use the term *supra*-natural instead of *super*-natural since *supra* more precisely conveys the original, technical meaning of “above.”

The Latin term *supernaturalis* first appeared in the ninth century. John Scotus Erfigena used it in his translation of the works of pseudo-Dionysius from Greek into Latin. He coined this Latin term as a translation for the Greek adjective *huperphues*. The prefix *huper* (beyond) was used in inference to *phusis* (the nature or essence of reality) to denote something as transcending the ordinary, visible world. Thomas Aquinas featured this term prominently and is largely responsible for its widespread technical use in Christian theology.

If Augustine is credited with providing the standardization of the various Christian doctrines for Western Christianity in the fourth century A.D.,

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Aquinas in the thirteenth century A.D. is credited with providing a Christian metaphysical framework for these doctrines. This distinction between the various doctrines of Christian faith on the one hand, and a systematic worldview on the other hand, is important to keep in mind because the two are not necessarily connected. As Etienne Gilson points out, Thomas Aquinas never intended to alter the essentials of Christian theology itself as interpreted by Augustine, but he did intend to change the "bad" philosophy of Augustine into a "true" philosophy consistent with Augustine's own theology. In fact, Gilson shows that for Aquinas "it is not even necessary for theology to resort to philosophy, but, if it does, the philosophy it uses should be the true philosophy."7

Aquinas accepted Augustinian theology, but he disagreed with its largely Platonic trappings. Consequently, he adapted Augustinian theology to an Aristotelian ontology.8 The distinction between the natural and the supernatural worlds became the fundamental categories for describing the relation of God and the world. The purpose of this supernaturalism was to provide a more philosophically reasoned worldview in which all the doctrines of the Christian faith could be housed and thus they would have an intellectual unity supporting them.

The term supernatural is not found in the Septuagint, nor in the New Testament, nor in the early Church Fathers.9 Yet the term is standard currency in Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant theology. Even those theologies which reject supernaturalism depend upon its terminology for expressing its alternative forms of Christian naturalism. For example, Paul Tillich's theology was devoted to providing "ecstatic naturalism" as an alternative to the supernaturalism of Protestant Orthodoxy.10 In his last public lecture in Chicago, Tillich admitted that his own apologetic theology was too heavily dominated by his attempt to provide an alternative theology to supranaturalism.11 It could be argued that all modern and contemporary theological movements are unintelligible without the supernaturalism which they attempt to refute or embrace.12

THE FAILURE OF SUPERNATURALISM

The question is whether or not supernaturalism should now be abandoned in spite of its venerable history. Until recently, the two basic models for defining God's whereabouts have been "above" or "within." The "above" model led to supranaturalistic deism and finally to a secularistic naturalism which dropped "the aboveness" of God and spiritual realities altogether since the world "below" was allegedly adequate within itself. The supernatural hypothesis was declared irrelevant for modern thought.

Paul Tillich's critique largely focused on the artificiality of, as well as the logical incoherence of, two separate realms. To postulate the idea of a God above the world who interferes with, and breaks into, the lower realm below would involve the demonic destruction of the created order itself.13 His alternative proposal was a naturalism in which God is located "within" the
world as the ground of being.

The "within" model leads inevitably to pantheistic mysticism in which the distinction between God and the world is blurred. Since Schleiermacher, all forms of modern theology which reject supernaturalism in favor of naturalism have been hard-pressed to defend themselves against the charge of blurring the difference between God and creation.

Barth attempted to rehabilitate supernaturalism, but his tendency was to make God "permanently transcending time," and hence rationally inaccessible. The further dilemma of Barth's supernaturalism was its excessive revelationism, and consequently the relation of reason and faith was seriously damaged. In effect, Barth conceded the point of the atheistic critique (expressed by Feuerbach and Nietzsche) which had declared the world devoid of any rational justification for belief in God. Pannenberg asks:

But is Feuerbach really overcome in this way? Is it not instead merely a case of withdrawing from controversy with Feuerbach and his disciples if theology, unperturbed, begins to speak about God as if nothing had happened; without establishing any basis, or offering any justification for this concept except by referring to the fact that Christian preaching about God actually goes on? Is that not senseless renunciation of all critical discussion, and thus an act of spiritual capitulation to Feuerbach?

Pannenberg recognizes the value of taking seriously the critique of modern atheism. Barth's approach of pursuing theology "from above" is like "a blind alley" and endangers "the truth of the Christian faith itself and its speech about God." What is now needed is "a philosophical anthropology worked out within the framework of a general ontology" in order to address the legitimate concerns of secularistic naturalism.

An Anglo-Catholic theologian/philosopher who impressively attempted to rehabilitate supernaturalism is E. L. Mascall. His brilliant exposition of the classical doctrine of God is found in *He Who Is*. Yet Mascall admits that the tendency of the supernatural/natural distinction is to make the two realms only artificially related. He specifically recognizes that "imagery of levels...is quite inadequate, for it fails to do justice to the intimacy of the relation" between the supernatural and natural. He especially criticizes the Catholic textbooks for fostering this misunderstanding.

With the help of all the intricacies and sophistication of modern symbolic logic, many contemporary analytical philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition have impressively attempted to resolve the ambiguities and alleged contradictions of the traditional, supernatural view of a personal God. However, whether or not the logical tools of analytical philosophy can repair the damage done by the atheistic critique is problematic. It may be that the atheistic critique too simplistically dismisses and distorts a supernatural view of God, but the complicated arguments of modern logic used to
defend supernaturalism may indirectly serve to reinforce the atheistic charge that belief in a personal God is only contrived.

The supernatural/natural ontology is a hierarchical/monarchical/feudalistic model. Even before Thomas Aquinas featured supernaturalism, classical theology tended toward Monarchianism in spite of its rejection of this heresy. For example, Augustine clearly articulated the three persons of God, but for all practical purposes he (as well as the Western Church in general, as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox tradition) tended toward Monarchianism because his primary interest was the unity of God rather than the three divine persons.

With the subsequent development of a supernatural ontology in Latin Scholasticism, the oneness of God became even more specifically interpreted in a hierarchical/monarchical/feudalistic manner. For God's oneness as a feudalistic lord over His subjects was featured rather than the Three Persons. Yet, even so, theology in the Middle Ages did not define God as a person. That would have been considered what we call today a Unitarian heresy.

Yet this monarchical tendency to exclude the trinitarian persons resulted in the heretical, modern redefinition of God as a Person rather than three Persons. Tillich points out that this happened "only in the nineteenth century" with Kant's deistic supernaturalism. In this respect, Pannenberg points out that in Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant's redefinition of person as an independent being with a radically individualized self-consciousness became determinative for the modern understanding of person. This absolute understanding of person is anticipated in the fourth century A.D. in Boethius's definition of person as rational individuality, but with Kant the ideas of self-consciousness and autonomy became the constitutive element in the meaning of person.

The pre-modern view, on the other hand, assumed that the decisive component of person was one's capacity to experience community and to develop intimate relationships with others. This relational understanding of person was decisive for the theological development of a Christian understanding of God as three Persons in the fourth and fifth centuries.

As a result of the absolutizing of individual self-consciousness as the meaning of person in the modern world, Tillich says that "ordinary theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind." Tillich agrees with "the protest of atheism against such a highest person."

Pannenberg has traced the development and rise of the modern understanding of personhood from the christological and trinitarian doctrines of the third and fourth centuries to its culmination in Hegel's philosophy. Of course, the ultimate source lies in the history of ancient Israel where God discloses Himself to Abraham as the personal Lord of history. The Old Testament idea of God's spiritual transcendence and difference from nature was a necessary prerequisite for the development of the understanding of
human self-transcendence associated with the meaning of personhood in the modern world, as secularist philosophers and psychologists generally recognize.\(^{28}\)

Pannenberg has shown how modern atheism in the nineteenth century developed as the logical conclusion of Kant’s definition of personhood as absolute subjectivity. In this respect, Kant, not Descartes, was the father of modern subjectivity. For Kant was the first thinker to make individual self-consciousness not only the basis of our certainty of knowledge (as Descartes had done), but also the actual creator and source of the world which we know.\(^{29}\) Kant’s deistic supernaturalism allowed for both God and humans to be autonomous persons and creators. Instead of a relational understanding of persons as classically expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity, Kant introduced a new element into the concept of personhood which made self-consciousness the absolute basis of reality itself. The consequence was that the practical Monarchianism of Western theology became actual Monarchianism in the deistic supernaturalism of Kant’s concept of God. God was now defined as an infinite Person.

Hegel continued and deepened this new idea of God as the Supreme Person, and he more specifically replaced the classical terminology of one divine substance with one divine subject.\(^{30}\) God is the Absolute Subject, but whereas Kant deistically polarized God and the world, Hegel attempted to reconcile God and the world through his philosophy of history. Unlike Kant, Hegel would not accept the idea of a lifeless Supreme Being who dwells outside the sphere of the world. For Hegel, those modern theologians who accused Spinoza of atheism because he did not believe in a Supreme Being had embraced a worse kind of atheism because they affirmed the existence of the Supreme Being but denied that human beings could really know Him. Hegel rejected Spinoza’s pantheism also, and he did so precisely because Spinoza’s concept of the divine substance did not include the idea of God as “the absolute Person...which constitutes the content of religious consciousness in Christianity,” as Hegel pointedly says.\(^{31}\) Hegel’s emphasis, then, was that God is a personal Subject, not an impersonal Substance.

Hegel also sought to include the Trinity within his doctrine of God’s personality. So Hegel combined the absolute and the relational understanding of personhood. This culmination of the modern development of personhood in Hegel’s philosophy is a legitimate extension of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity,\(^{32}\) but its primary application to the unity of God instead of His Trinity is where the difficulty lies.\(^{33}\)

Moltmann has shown that Barth’s concept of God as the divine Subject, as opposed to Tertullian’s definition of God as divine Substance, is largely borrowed from Hegel’s modern redefinition of God as Absolute Personality.\(^{34}\) Pannenberg has also shown that Barth’s idea of God’s revelation as a self-revelation is borrowed from Hegel’s philosophy of religion where this idea first appeared.\(^{35}\) Previously, revelation had been largely defined tradi-
tionally as propositions and information contained in the Bible.

Though an abstract monotheism which culminates in the idea of God as a personal Subject can be traced back to the monarchical tendencies of Western theology, deistic supranaturalism was the penultimate culmination of this trend, with modern atheism as the final product. Barth's theology restored an emphasis upon the doctrine of the Trinity, but he so strongly emphasized the oneness of God's being that his otherwise proper restoration of the Trinity to its rightful place in theology was undermined. This can be seen in the way that Barth preferred to speak of God's oneness as a Person and to downgrade the Trinity impersonally as modes of being. Moltmann calls Barth's abstract monotheism "a late triumph for the Sabellian modality, which the early church condemned."

To summarize, classical theology since Tertullian had defined God's unity as a substance, not as a person. The concept of person was reserved for the three persons of God. Yet, the subsequent development of Western theology tended, for all practical purposes, to treat the oneness of God concretely as "person" instead of the Trinity as persons. With the rise of Kant's rationalistic philosophy of religion, God was specifically defined as a supermundane Person. How to reconstruct this supranaturalistic, monarchical interpretation has been the preoccupation of modern theology from Schleiermacher to Barth.

MODERN ATHEISM AS THE LEFT-OVER REMAINS OF SUPERNATURALISM

The atheistic critique by the left-wing Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), focuses upon the arbitrariness of a God who alone possesses all the qualities which humans desire but are destined to do without. Beginning with Kant's and Hegel's new definition of personhood as the creative, autonomous self, Feuerbach's projection theory explained that human beings created God in their own image rather than God creating human beings in His own image. He especially attacked Lutheranism because it pits God as "the highest being" against the natural world as if God dwells above us in a supernatural world with an air of superiority, while human beings are totally bereft of any goodness or worth. Supposedly our only hope for a meaningful life comes as a gift when this angry God is appeased. This condescending attitude of a supernatural God whose superiority places Him above us destroys the foundation of human happiness, according to Feuerbach.

Previous to Feuerbach, modern atheism was merely an unproven assertion which grew out of the development of modern natural science and its mechanistic picture of the world, as seen in eighteenth-century France. For example, Laplace developed a mechanistic system of finite causes which were said to be self-sufficient. The mechanistic worldview of classical physics discarded the idea of a creator and, as such, the supernatural world was eliminated. Now, with Feuerbach's critique, modern atheism was provided
with its rationale.  

A further critique of secularistic naturalism, first advanced by Fichte (1762-1814) and subsequently reinforced by Feuerbach, was that the idea of a God above the world means God is simply another Person who co-exists alongside (or above) us. If God is a Person who co-exists with us, then He is necessarily finite, which is a contradiction to the doctrine of divine perfection—for personhood means having a specific self-consciousness, and whatever is specifically present is necessarily finite and limited.

A further criticism proposed by secularistic naturalism is that the idea of a supernatural Person who co-exists above us in another world would mean the elimination of human freedom. If God is the present reality and meaning of our world, then we are not free to decide what we will make of our lives. If God’s being is the goal of human destiny and He is totally present in this moment as the one who co-exists above us, then there is no room for human action based on free choice, since God is totally present as the one who has already actualized all potentiality of being. In order for human freedom to exist, the future must be a decisive component of reality, but the supernaturalistic model makes the “present” the essence of reality, and God is thus defined as the Timeless, Eternal Now.

Pannenberg takes seriously the critique of modern atheism. He believes it would be “premature” simply to dismiss modern atheism as “hatred of God.” Its criticisms are acute and must be addressed thoughtfully. In fact, Pannenberg is in agreement with the substantive arguments of secularistic naturalism. He admits, “A being presently at hand, and equipped with omnipotence, would destroy such freedom by virtue of his overpowering might.”

The way out of modern atheism is not “to retreat into a supranaturalistic wildlife sanctuary,” as Barthian theology does with its divorce between faith and reason. Pannenberg sees Barth’s theological subjectivism to be a surrender to the nihilism of Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Modern atheism must be understood as the outcome of the rise of human subjectivity as the criterion of truth, as developed in the philosophy of Descartes (1596-1650). Finally, the atheistic outcome is due to the idea of a supernaturalistic Absolute Subject (Person) who coexists “above” us. The atheistic critique of Fichte, Feuerbach and Nietzsche is based on this concept of a supramundane Person.

Secularistic naturalism refuted the idea of this supernaturalistic Subject (a divine Person) and replaced it with the autonomous subject (a human being). Not God but humans choose what is the truth! This atheistic self-affirmation is the inevitable consequence of a metaphysic of the will which Barth’s subjectivism presupposes.

Actually, it is not the subjectivism of Descartes’ rationalism and Locke’s empiricism, or the deistic supernaturalism of Kant, which can be blamed for the rise of modern atheism. The seeds were sown in Medieval scholastic theology with the development of a contrived compartmentalization of God
above the world who superimposed His will upon the world below. Pannenberg writes: "It is just supranaturalistic thought which turns out in the last analysis to have already presupposed Nietzsche's grounding of the truth upon the will."\(^{47}\)

"The only way to overcome" modern atheism, Pannenberg observes, "is by means of a more radical inquiry into being."\(^{48}\) "For theology, this means that its concept of God must be thought out in connection with the philosophical question about being if it is to be a match for the atheism of Nietzsche."\(^{49}\)

**THE IMPASSE OF THE GREEK AND BIBLICAL IDEAS OF TRUTH**

Pannenberg shows that classical theology defined God's being primarily in terms of one who is eternally present at hand, a self-contained Being alongside other beings.\(^{50}\) This concept of a transcendent Being was developed from Greek philosophy with its emphasis that true being is hidden behind the flux of sense-appearances. For the Greeks, true being is that which has no beginning and no end and is not affected by the flux of time and history. This unchanging truth of true being is not subject to the contingent events of sense-appearances, and thus true being guarantees the unity of truth and the dependability of the world.\(^{51}\) True being is thus timeless and without a history, according to Greek thought.

Pannenberg points out that it is understandable that Christian theology combined the *true being* of Greek thought with the God of the Bible. God is absolutely unchanging and reliable because He is the all-embracing truth. Yet there are significant differences between the Greek philosophy of true being and the biblical view of God.

First of all, the "Greek dualism between true being and changing sense-appearances is superseded in the biblical understanding of truth. Here, true being is thought of not as timeless but instead as historical, and it proves its stability through a history whose future is always open." God is known as the all-embracing truth because of the "trustful self-surrender of faith" to God who has disclosed Himself in the contingent events of history.\(^{52}\)

Another distinction in the biblical view is that God is personal, in contrast to the Greek idea of true being which is an abstract principle. Further, the Greek understanding assumes that truth is universally accessible to reason, whereas in the Hebrew understanding the unity and dependability of truth is experienced as one trusts in God's faithfulness as He has revealed Himself in the contingent events of their history.

It was not until modern times that the impasse between the Greek concept of truth as timelessness and the biblical understanding of truth as historic was recognized as a serious problem.\(^{53}\) The rise of historical thinking in the modern world is the outgrowth of the growing consciousness of the tension between these two understandings. Pannenberg has shown how the idea of truth in the West started with the Greek concept of the timelessness of truth which is fully and universally accessible to human reason. Accord-
ingly, cultural and historical differences are presumably irrelevant to the makeup of truth. With the rise of the modern historical consciousness (which is itself the outgrowth of a biblical understanding of reality), the Greek concept of a timeless truth existing independently in its own right was called into question and refuted by secularistic thought.

The irony is that the penetrating critique developed by modern, atheistic secularism is largely indebted to the biblical understanding of reality as history instead of the Greek understanding of truth as a rational penetration into the nature of true being. For example, modern atheism called into question the reality of a supramundane Being who lives in a timeless realm of perfection on the grounds that truth-claims are made from the standpoint of our historically-conditioned situation. One is not able to simply leap out of this world rationalistically or through suprahistoric revelation and make truth-claims which are not historically and culturally conditioned. Truth is not a matter of timeless, static propositions.

Equally ironic is that the idea of a supramundane Being who stands above or behind the world as the eternally present reality is derived from the Greek idea of true being and timelessness rather than from the biblical understanding of God as the Lord of history and the power of the unbounded future, whereas the atheistic insight that all truth is historically conditioned and contingent is ultimately derived from a biblical understanding of God who made Himself known through the contingent events of history.

Both the Greek and Hebrew ideas of truth have determined the understanding of truth in the West until the present day. For the Greeks, truth is something that lies under or behind things and is discovered by rational probing into their interior depths. For the Hebrews, Hans von Soden has shown that “reality is regarded as history” and “truth is that which will show itself in the future.” Ernst Cassirer has also demonstrated that the rise of the modern historical consciousness is the product of Christian faith itself. The irony is that secularistic naturalism has used the biblical insight concerning the historicality of truth to criticize and refute the Greek-inspired doctrine of supernaturalism.

Pannenberg points out that the Greek understanding prevailed until the modern world, and since the Romantic movement and the rise of the modern historical consciousness the biblical understanding of truth as history has been featured. It is no longer possible “rationalistically to separate the truth from its historically diverse forms.” Reason and history together form the essence of truth. So the dilemma of the Greek and biblical understanding of truth has been highlighted in the modern world with the consequence that the biblical perspective has become more determinative than in the pre-modern world. What is true emerges out of our personal and social relationships and is thus conditioned through the events of our history.

This personal/relational aspect of truth as conditioned by history was exaggerated in the subjectivism of Nietzsche, but it demonstrates that the
biblical motif of history and its emphasis on the personal character of reality has prevailed in the modern world. This shows that modern atheism has used the insights of the biblical understanding of the decisiveness of historically conditioned events as a basis for critiquing and refuting classical theology’s Greek-derived view of God as a supramundane Being.

Pannenberg has shown that the significance of Hegel’s philosophy was his penetrating insight into the historical development of truth and reality itself. Hegel’s philosophy was developed largely as a refutation of Kant’s deistic supernaturalism. It brought into focus a consciousness of the historical development of truth and of the relativity and contingency of history. His philosophy of history marked the culmination of the historical movement in the modern world. Hegel showed that truth is not something which is a finished product existing behind or within the world, but rather truth is history, a process. Only at the end of history does the unity and wholeness of truth become known. His point is that the meaning of each event is determined, not by the present or past, but by its future.

The shocking thing about Hegel’s philosophy was not pantheism. Pannenberg, like many other Hegelian interpreters, believes Hegel affirmed the personality of God. Rather, the staggering idea in Hegel was that he defined the end of history with his own present situation! Hegel had no open future. His eschatology was “radically contemporaneous.”

Pannenberg’s admiration for Hegel lay in his understanding of the historical character of all truth as defined by the future instead of the present or past. Pannenberg finds it regrettable that no one since Hegel has posed the question of the unity of truth “with a comparable depth.” Yet modern thinking is determined by the consciousness of the historical conditioning of all truth—a consciousness which stems from a biblical understanding of truth and reality. However, the search for the unity of truth has largely been given up by contemporary philosophers since it is apparent that its unity could only be seen from the standpoint of the future, and since no one has this eschatological perspective, any talk about the unity seems superficial.

BEYOND THE IMPASSE

Pannenberg’s theological efforts have been devoted to the development of a theology of history which uses Jesus’ eschatological message of the future of God’s reign as a basis for showing how the unity of truth can be affirmed and known. He believes the biblical-Christian understanding of truth provides the solution to the problem raised by the Greeks concerning the unity of truth. Unlike classical theology which defined God’s true being according to the Greek notion of the timeless present, Pannenberg draws from the biblical tradition as the basis for defining God as the power of the unbounded future.

Pannenberg develops the eschatological message of Jesus to show how the Greek idea of truth as true being—which is characterized by unity and unchangeableness—and the biblical understanding of truth as historical—
which is characterized by the contingency of events and the openness of the future—become one.65

What has now emerged in recent theological reflection is Pannenberg’s new model for perceiving the relation of God and the world. Instead of God being “above,” or “within” the world, God stands “ahead of” us as the power of the unbounded future. God’s specific transcendent being and otherness from the world is still affirmed, but His “space” is not above us, or within us, but in front of us. He is the attracting, magnetic power of the unbounded future who shapes our present. The being of God is not above us as an object which we could bypass or overlook; He is not the inner essence of all beings as if He were the background within nature. The mode of God’s being is the unbounded future. The “above” and the “within” model is flawed because it pictures God’s space as timeless. The “ahead of” model is able to do justice both to the specificity of a particular, independent Being who is other than this finite world and at the same it is able to picture God’s space as the unbounded future for whom time is real.

The idea of history as the sphere of development—along with the understanding of the progressive revelation—of God’s self in the contingency of events, stands in contradiction to the timelessness of the supernaturalistic and the pantheistic models. Pannenberg writes: “The idea of the future as a mode of God’s being is still undeveloped in theology despite the intimate connection between God and the coming reign of God in eschatological message of Jesus.”66

Pannenberg has now developed such a model. Pannenberg proposes this eschatological worldview as a replacement for supernaturalism. It is not an alternative to supernaturalism in the sense that most forms of naturalism are attempts to reconstruct Christian theology according to a non-miraculous interpretation which eliminates the activity of a personal God in history. Rather, Pannenberg’s eschatologicalism is an entirely different model from the supernatural/natural dichotomy.

Pannenberg has explained that his “approach to the ontological question takes into account the concerns of supernaturalism (in contrast to a self-sufficient secularist concept of nature), while not yielding to the temptation of dualism that is not very well reconcilable to the biblical faith in creation.”67

Pannenberg thus proposes a new way of thinking about the relation between God and the world, while maintaining the essential distinction between an infinite personal Being and the created world. Indeed Pannenberg says that any use of the word God which eliminates the idea of a personal reality independent from the created world is meaningless.68

Pantheism dissolves divine personality into a timeless space as an impersonal power “within.” Supernaturalism elevates God into a space far “above” the finite world and depersonalizes the world by alienating human beings from their true essence; it suggests that this world is devoid of God because God is “above” us. Hence we dwell alone—except as God superim-
poses Himself from above and enters into relationship with us. Because of the unnaturalness of God’s presence in the world “below” which this model entails, the relationship which He develops with us in this god-forsaken world seems forced and unnatural as well. Consequently, the biblical doctrine of the divine condescension degenerates into a feeling that God takes a condescending attitude toward us, just as the biblical understanding of God’s transcendence (as the Lord of history) takes on the non-biblical idea of a spatial separation of God from us as if He coexists above us. Biblically speaking, our aloneness is not due to God’s spatial transcendence over us, but to the brokenness of our relationship with God as reflected in our disobedience (Genesis 3). It is sin which separates us from a proper relationship to God, not God’s cosmologically superior location.

An eschatological perspective locates God “ahead of” us, leading us to our true destiny. Pannenberg writes: “Man participates in God not by flight from the world but by active transformation of the world which is the expression of the divine love, the power of the future over the present by which it is transformed in the direction of the glory of God.”69 God is really present in our world because He relates to us through His Son Jesus whose Spirit indwells us. God is not an absentee landlord who has abandoned us. Eschatological avoids the schizophrenic split of two worlds to which supernaturalism easily succumbed, while at the same time it avoids the flat and impersonal (autistic) one-storied world of naturalism. An eschatological perspective rejects the idea of different stories or separate realms of being, and it further rejects a naturalistic assumption of one static realm.

The eschatological model also avoids the charge that human freedom cannot be affirmed simultaneously with belief in a personal God, for God is not totally present at hand in a timeless realm. Such a timeless, supramundane Being necessarily excludes the idea of temporal development and stands in contradiction to the biblical view of God as the Lord of history.

The biblical understanding leaves the future open for us as an opportunity to participate in the history of God’s coming kingdom. Without an open future where reality is not yet decided and formed, there can be no freedom. But if God is “ahead of” us as the unlimited future, this means time is real for God as well as for finite persons.

The eschatological model also avoids the condescending attitude of the monarchical/supernatural model in which human beings feel the ultimate put-down (notice the double meaning of this term) of reality, as if human beings are totally depraved and worthless because of their finite humanity. It was this perception which led to Nietzsche’s ethical refutation of God—that such a dehumanizing God ought to be killed. Contemporary theologians, such as Paul Tillich, Thomas Altizer and John Cobb have embraced Nietzsche concerning the death of a supernatural/monarchical God.70 Yet their alternative to the supernaturalism which they reject is a naturalism which obscures God’s relation with His creation.

This atheistic criticism is effectively met in Pannenberg’s eschatological-
ism with its proposal for a new paradigm concerning God’s being which at the same time preserves the concerns of supernaturalism. Pannenberg’s emphasis is on the trinitarian persons who are presently inviting us to share in the fellowship of the coming kingdom of God. God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is actively involved in this temporal process. For this world is God’s world, not something inherently alien to His true being, and history is the field of His action. This means God endures the pain of our world and through His sufferings we are being reconciled and restored to Himself. This is to say, God comes to our situation and gets involved with us in order to establish a relationship with us. For it is God’s very Self which saves us. As Pannenberg puts it, “The salvation that God promises is himself.” This emphasis that God reveals Himself, not merely useful information about Himself, is the significant contribution of Karl Barth to modern/contemporary theology as Pannenberg has often acknowledged. It is knowledge of God Himself, of being personally acquainted with God in Jesus through the indwelling Spirit, which restores to us our sense of human dignity and feeling of personal worth.

However, Barth’s emphasis on God’s Self-disclosure is weakened by the notion of a supranatural Being who stands over against this godless world. For Barth, this finite, natural world is so different from God that not even human language is fit to speak of God’s reality. Barth says God has to “commandeer” human speech to say what it is totally unprepared and inadequate to say. Hence Barth’s theology makes excessive use of paradoxical language, divorces reason and faith, and labels any type of analogy between God and the world as unchristian.

The doctrine of the Trinity as formulated in classical theology really supports the view that God’s being is to be defined in terms of futurity rather than in terms of a supramundane Being. For the historical, progressive revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit points us to the future of God who is already enabling us to participate in His coming Kingdom. This unbounded future is the place where history will finally become one with the essence of God—not pantheistically, but in the sense that God’s kingdom will be complete. The Book of Revelation described this future event as a perfect relationship with God whose immediate presence makes everything whole, and God is described in historical terms as “the alpha and the omega,” “the beginning and the end” (Revelation 20-22). Pannenberg thus links the Greek idea of true being, not with “a mere beyond contrasting with man’s present,” but with “the pure futurity of God.”

In developing his eschatologicalism, Pannenberg is integrating the Greek emphasis on truth as a rational understanding of true being with the biblical emphasis on truth as a relational understanding of reality as history. Unlike the classical Christian tradition which allowed the Greek understanding to dominate theological thinking about God’s being, Pannenberg wants to reassert the priority of the biblical understanding and, more importantly, Jesus’ own teaching as the basis for thinking about God’s being. Pan-
nenberg’s use of the Greek understanding of truth can be seen in the way that he seeks rationally to give Jesus’ teaching an ontological structure, but the substance of that ontological structure is the biblical understanding of reality as history.

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Pannenberg’s eschatological ontology is exegetically based in Jesus’ message on the imminent Kingdom of God. He takes seriously the well-known tension between the “already” and “not yet” aspects of the Kingdom of God. Pannenberg sees this tension to mean both future and present are “inextricably interwoven.”

God’s Kingdom is not merely some future cosmic event while human beings simply wait and endure for its arrival. Rather, the present is pregnant with meaning because God, who is the power of the future, extends His rule in the present. This means the present is the effect of the future. God, as the power of the future, has acted decisively in His Son whose message, life and destiny have eschatological significance for all people.

This presupposition of the coming Kingdom for theological reflection holds in utter seriousness the cosmic and historical implications of Jesus’ eschatological message. This eschatological future cannot be simply narrowed down existentially to mean that one should appropriate the possibilities of human existence, as Bultmann does. Nor must it be reduced to the idea of a mere ethical attainment on the part of human beings as though they could bring about the Kingdom of God on earth by the means of their own initiative, as classical liberal theology maintained.

Jesus’ teaching on the imminent kingdom of God means “this future is expected to come in a marvelous way from God himself; it is not simply the development of human history or the achievement of God-fearing men,” Pannenberg insists.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of Jesus’ eschatological message consisted not in His mere preaching concerning the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth, but rather that the presence of this coming Kingdom was now already happening in His person, thus showing that the present is to be seen in the light of the future and that Jesus Himself as God’s Son is the pre-actualization of the future.

This brings us to Pannenberg’s idea of an eschatological doctrine of creation. The ontological implication of Jesus’ eschatological message suggests a reversal in the traditional understanding of the time sequence. Creation does not simply stand at the opposite pole of eschatology within the time spectrum. Rather, theology should speak of a “creative eschaton,” thereby showing that the temporal beginnings of the history of the world eventuate from the future and that God as the power of the future is creatively directing the course of history toward the ultimate inauguration of His Kingdom.

This means creation should not be seen from the perspective of a mere primordial beginning. Both creation and eschatology are “partners in the
formation of reality.""82 This means the future provides the basis for interpreting the meaning of every event in the present. "At present a being is 'something,' a unity in itself, only by anticipation of its unifying future. The future interprets the present and the past; all other interpretations are helpful only to the degree that they anticipate the future.""83

This eschatological understanding is the "resounding motif of Jesus' message.""84 To speak of the Kingdom of God is to speak of the rule of God. To speak of the rule of God is to speak of the being of God, since His rule cannot be thought of apart from His existence. To speak of the being of God in connection with the rule of God is to speak of the power of God, for it is through the power of His being that He rules. And, since Jesus' eschatological message proclaimed both the "already" and the "not yet" aspects of the Kingdom of God, it can be said "in a restricted but important sense, God does not yet exist. Since his rule and his being are inseparable, God's being is still in the process of coming to be.""85 In this way, Pannenberg is showing that the oneness of God's being is linked primarily with the coming Kingdom of God in history, while the three persons of the Trinity are the concrete realities of the one God (as opposed to the abstract oneness of God). History is in process of moving toward its goal in the being of God (that is, we will be incorporated into the life and being of God), but of course we will not become pantheistically one with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this way, Pannenberg points out that it is in the eschaton that God's rule shall be universally established at which time it can be said that the goal of history will be attained, thus showing the end of history will be one with the essence of God.

To speak of the eschatological future of the kingdom of God is not to eliminate the reality of God's presence and rule in the present. Present eschatological existence is available to human beings because the eschatological future has proleptically occurred in Jesus of Nazareth, whose redemptive life effected our reconciliation with God. Or, to put it otherwise, salvation is available to us today because the future of God's Kingdom in which God reigns supremely and universally has been unveiled in Jesus' eschatological message and person, and those who accept His message of forgiveness also accept Him. It is through His cross and resurrection that Jesus' person and message are seen to be interrelated. Thus, those who believe in Jesus already participate in the coming Kingdom of God."86

To speak of the coming Kingdom of God is not to degrade the past. For God as the power of the future rules the past as well as the present. This means to speak of God as the power of the future is to speak of His eternity. To be sure, eternity is not a timeless reality. It is not the unchanging, primordial and eternal present of Platonic philosophy. Neither is God "the concept of a timeless ground of being in the depths of reality, in the background of the realm of being.""87 Rather, time is implicit in the very essence of God."88 This means that only in the actualization of the future—i.e., in the eschaton when God's Kingdom shall become a concrete and universal reality—will
history be one with the essence of God. Only then will God’s self revelation be direct, for both His will and purpose will be communicated in an unbroken and direct manner. In philosophical terms, this means subject and object will be identical, that what-is will be fully revealed in what-appears, that the one who communicates and what is communicated will be identical.

In contrast to Whitehead, who posits the idea of a development in God because of His involvement in time, Pannenberg sees the futurity of God’s Kingdom to mean that what truth is in the present will be decided from the standpoint of the future. But this does not mean that God undergoes a development in His essence. Rather, when the goal of history has been accomplished, it will be seen that what is true then was true throughout the movement of time.89

Pannenberg is not suggesting that God merely relates Himself to finite human beings as the power of the future, but that God is in Himself the power of the future. This means God is pure freedom.90 However, without the concept of the future there can be no concept of freedom or personhood. In this respect, only if human beings have a future do they have freedom. Openness to the future is a fundamental feature of freedom and individuality. This means we are free to the extent that we can transcend ourselves and thus transform and go beyond the present. In contrast to us, God is pure freedom because there is no future beyond Him. He is the unbounded future.

This idea of the personality and freedom of God is distinguished from Paul Tillich’s belief that God is not a being or a person but Being itself, the Ground of Being and “the ground of everything personal.”91 However, Pannenberg points out that unless God is thought of as an independent Being with personality, the concept of God is meaningless.92 Pannenberg shows that God is the power of Being because He is the power of the future and thus pure freedom. “Being is itself to be thought of from the side of the future, instead of as the abstract, most universal something in the background of all beings.”93 Since God (as Being) is the power of the future, this suggests His eternity.

In this respect, Pannenberg calls for a revision of the Greek idea of eternity (as the eternal present). Since God exists as the final future, then the idea of eternity may be defined as “the totally comprehensive present.”94 In this way, the concept of eternity includes the element of change and time instead of static permanence and timelessness.

From our finite perspective it can be said that “the eschaton is eternity in the fullest sense.”95 Eternity refers to the existence (or Being) of God. And since in the eschaton it is the essence of God to exist, the past, present and future are merged into one. This means the eschaton is the arrival of the Kingdom of God. To be sure, God’s existence has been from eternity and He has always remained the same because in His pure freedom He exists as the final future. But for finite man, God’s essence does not yet fully exist. It is only in the eschaton that God’s essence will be directly seen to exist.
By emphasizing the futurity of the Kingdom of God which will disclose the essence of God, it should be reiterated that this does not devalue the present. Nor does it adopt any form of theological agnosticism. To be sure, our knowledge of God’s revelation can be ascertained historically as it is reported in the biblical tradition, and thus our relationship to God through Jesus of Nazareth is no pious self-delusion. But, our objective knowledge (insight) of God’s self-revelation is only indirect and partial, and can only be direct and complete in the eschaton. On the other hand, our experience of God through faith in Jesus is direct and immediate, for fellowship with Jesus “really mediates and assures salvation,” Pannenberg writes.96

He further writes: “He who believes in Jesus has salvation in Jesus whom he trusts, without regard to the question how it stands with his historical and theological knowledge of Jesus,” though of course one must at least presuppose the message of Jesus is true.97

The distinction between God’s indirect and direct self-revelation (or stated otherwise, the distinction between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom of God) can be further illustrated in the philosophical distinction of appearance and reality. The unity and difference between appearance and reality has been a subject of considerable debate in the history of philosophy. Without developing all the problems and issues connected with this debate in this article, it is evident that Pannenberg’s epistemology is a realism (as opposed to idealism and positivism) because he defines appearance as a truthful disclosure of what is real. What-appears is what-is, though at the same time it must be said that what-is is not exhausted in what-appears. Reality appears in more than one event, and yet reality is more than its appearances. This does not suggest that appearance is mere semblance. Rather, what-is really appears. Pannenberg writes: “Connected with the possibility of manifold appearance of one and the same *eidos* is the fact that it exhausts itself in none of its appearances. There always remain other ways in which ‘the same’ *eidos* could appear.”98

Insofar as the kingdom of God is concerned, it has already appeared in the ministry of Jesus. In His person, the coming Kingdom of God has already commenced in the world, though at the same time the present appearance of the reality of the Kingdom of God does not exhaust its futurity. This is to say, the reality of the kingdom of God has already made its appearance, even though this appearance is to be differentiated from its reality. Only in the eschaton will the reality of the kingdom of God be identical with its appearance.

This distinction between the present appearance and the future reality of the Kingdom of God corresponds to the distinction between God as Father and Jesus as Son. That the Kingdom of God has appeared means that the reign of God was begun on earth in the person of Jesus. This means “that God himself had uniquely and definitely appeared in Jesus without the difference between Jesus and God himself being thereby dissolved.”99 Thus, the arrival of the future reality of the Kingdom of God in the present means
that God joined Himself to the finite by making His appearance in Jesus, though without restricting the reality of Himself to His appearance in Jesus. Pannenberg writes: "The distinctive characteristic of the message of Jesus is that the future of the rule of God is not separated from the present as still outstanding, but that precisely as the future it becomes the power that determines the present and thus comes to appearance in the present." Stated philosophically, this means appearance is the partial arrival of the future.

It is this combined unity and difference in appearance and reality that places the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation at variance with the ancient oriental religions in which any certain form of the deity's appearance was inconsequential because its appearance constituted no essential unity with the god. Because of this separation of appearance and reality, the mythical god could "appear" in as many forms as it wished, for its appearance was nonessential to its being. Likewise, in Platonic philosophy appearance was nonessential to true being. Such is not the case with the idea of the Incarnation. The appearance of God in Jesus of Nazareth means His essential unity with God, thus suggesting that appearance and essential presence coincide. This inseparable interaction between appearance and reality illustrates the doctrine of the Incarnation in which there is the inseparable connection between Jesus as the appearance of God and the reality of God.

Thus, the significance of the appearance of God in Jesus is that His appearance is an enduring present appearance because it is the essential presence of the unlimited future. Theologically stated, the reality of God as the unbounded future has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth, and this appearance is a permanent and enduring present because it is the appearance of the ultimate reality of the future (i.e., God).

The obvious implication of such an "enduring present" is that in Jesus of Nazareth we have the finality of God's revelation so long as history is still hastening toward the eschaton. This is to say, if the reality of God has appeared in Jesus, then He is the anticipation of the ultimate future which is God. And, if the appearance of Jesus is the arrival of what is the ultimate future, then no other event can surpass the Christ-event without involving itself in a logical contradiction. To be sure, God continues to work in history, but He does not reveal Himself in any fundamentally new manner (i.e., if the appearance of Jesus is really the arrival of God as the power of the future).

Pannenberg thus offers an ontological perspective which (1) identifies reality with the comprehensive whole of history rather than with the unchanging, primordial, eternal present of Platonic philosophy; (2) interprets the transcendence of God eschatologically rather than supernaturally; and (3) understands the being of God socially rather than monarchically.

ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Pannenberg, in responding to some of his critics, shows that to affirm "that reality is history hastening toward an End" does not mean that history is
merely the external exhibition of a logically fixed Idea (as in Hegel), for this in effect would reduce history to the nonessential insofar as anything really new occurring.\textsuperscript{104} Rather, history as it moves toward its goal in the eschaton in fact undergoes further development which includes modifications and transformations of present reality.\textsuperscript{105} Despite this contingency and inconclusiveness of history, to think in terms of the whole of reality is an inescapable fact of life, even though it is usually done unreflectively.\textsuperscript{106}

Pannenberg does not assert, however, that one can attain absolute knowledge as though he would be able, on the basis of present experience, to comprehend the whole of history.\textsuperscript{107} But he does argue that the whole of reality can be historically mediated provisionally and proleptically on the basis of God’s activity in the world.

Pannenberg acknowledges his indebtedness to Hegel’s insights concerning the idea of a universal history, but he denies that he is a Hegelian because Hegel failed to appreciate the biblical understanding of an open future which has been provisionally and proleptically revealed in the history of Jesus. He further insists that the origin of the idea of universal history is in the biblical tradition itself.\textsuperscript{108}

In asserting that it is history as the whole of reality that reveals the essence of God, Pannenberg does not intend to suggest that the infinite is reduced to the finite or that God is identical with the process of history itself. But neither is God to be thought of as a timeless, static Being. Rather, He is creatively active in the process of history. He is the power of the future who works in the present in order to usher in His Kingdom. This is not to localize the infinite in the finite. Neither is it to adopt “an exclusive immanence” (which is itself a contradiction in terms)\textsuperscript{109} as opposed to a transcendence. Pannenberg explains that “history is not the field of a finitude which is enclosed within itself, an ‘immanence’ to which one could and indeed would have to oppose a ‘transcendence.’” Instead, Pannenberg shows that history is “the ongoing collapse of the existing reality which is enclosed in its own ‘immanence’ (because centered on itself). The power of the infinite is active and present in this collapse of the finite.”\textsuperscript{110} Thus, history is not merely the sum total of what human beings have done and suffered. Neither is history merely the creation of human beings. What human beings are and what they create is finite, but history in this sense is not finite. “Rather, it accomplishes the crisis of the finite throughout time. Hence man shows himself to be finite in his history.”\textsuperscript{111}

Pannenberg further points out that history is not itself self-explanatory apart from the transcendent reality of God who chooses to make Himself known in history. If history were thought of as being “wholly other” from the reality of God, then there would be no purpose in speaking of God, if history in this respect were complete and comprehensible without Him. “Only because the infinite reality, which as personal can be called God, is present and active in the history of the finite, can one speak of a revelation of God in history. For it is thereby concretely shown that the finite is not left
to itself."\textsuperscript{112}

This is not to say that history reveals God as an inference, as though this would constitute a cosmological proof for the existence of God corresponding to the Greek idea of a timeless cosmos from which one infers the existence of one God. Rather, God is "immediately perceptible to men" because He makes Himself known, and thus this knowledge "is not first discovered upon reflection by means of an inference."\textsuperscript{113}

**SOME FINAL PERSONAL COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS**

Most Evangelicals have appreciated Pannenberg's theology of Jesus' resurrection, but they have also been skeptical of his historical/critical methodology because of its apparent anti-supernaturalism. Daniel Fuller was one of the earliest American Evangelicals to embrace Pannenberg's theology, but he disagreed with its non-supernatural worldview.\textsuperscript{114}

What Fuller and others fail to appreciate is that Pannenberg is not an anti-supernaturalist in the sense which many theologians are (like Paul Tillich), but rather he wants to preserve the essential truth of supernaturalism with its emphasis on God's transcendence and divine otherness. Further, Pannenberg's replacement of supernaturalism with eschatologicalism is not linked to any hesitancy to embrace miracles. Rather, he objects to the idea that miracles are interruptions from above. In this respect, Pannenberg is closer to Augustine's view of miracles than Aquinas's. Augustine interpreted miracles as a normal result of God's presence in creation as opposed to Aquinas who saw miracles as superimposed on the created, natural order from above.\textsuperscript{115} For Pannenberg every event is a miracle because of God's personal and intimate involvement with His creation. Pannenberg will not allow for a supernatural/natural dichotomy.

Some Evangelical theologians in America describe themselves as Protestant in their theology, but Thomistic in their metaphysic.\textsuperscript{116} Some find little in Thomistic theology or Thomistic metaphysics which they like,\textsuperscript{117} but continue to use the supernatural/natural categories of Thomism. In fact, almost no one in conservative, Evangelical circles would question the validity of supernaturalism—a situation for which they really have Thomas Aquinas largely to thank.

I find myself thankful for the clarifying function of the supernatural model, especially during my own seminary student days. With no alternate model available which could help put the biblical doctrines into a metaphysical framework, supernaturalism has been a most important intellectual tool for enabling me to appreciate the mystery and reality of a transcendent, self-sustaining God who created the world \textit{ex nihilo}. And I have found supernaturalism helpful as a teaching aid for enabling my students to grasp the difference between a biblical understanding of God and the various subbiblical views which obscure God's difference from creation. It also provided for a more sophisticated way of interpreting the figurative language in the Bible of a three-storied universe of heaven above us with God in the
"highest heaven" (2 Chron 6:18) and hell beneath us.

Yet my students repeatedly found it difficult to understand how we could speak of God’s revelation if He is really separated from the world in another world above us. To qualify God’s “ableness” as not really meaning that He was entirely above us leaves unanswered the question of what is meant by the difference between God and the world. To appeal to the analogical nature of religious language (of Thomism) as a basis for explaining the relationship was to admit we should not seek for an answer, but just take it on faith! Of course God is ultimately mystery and incomprehensible, and our explicit knowledge of His reality is limited. (That is why in worship our language becomes doxological!) So our tacit knowledge of God exceeds our explicit knowledge. But the supernatural model obscures our understanding of how God can be known as a real presence in our world, if He dwells cosmologically above us.

Instead of a Thomistic doctrine of analogical language, Pannenberg believes that Michael Polanyi’s distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, along with his emphasis on the personal/religious nature of human language in general, is a more fruitful way of explaining the nature of theological language.¹¹ This avoids the logical difficulty associated with the doctrine of the analogy of being—that our words are forced to speak of two separate realms at the same time. Analogical language is vulnerable to the charge that its speech is equivocal and artificial, whereas Polanyi’s analysis of the tacit dimension suggests a model which maintains that human words are inherently religious (“user friendly”) and readily facilitate an understanding of spiritual realities. The theological task of developing a more explicit understanding of our tacit knowledge of God does not require an artificial linkage between the supernatural and the natural. Human speech is first and foremost religious in its essence and can be further refined by philosophers and theologians to accommodate a more precise and explicit understanding of the religious dimension. On the other hand, a Thomistic concept of analogical language, with its assumption that human words must be lifted beyond their natural meanings and given a supernatural denotation, resulted in the secularist rationalization of language—as if words are inherently secular. Pannenberg’s early research into the history of religious language convinced him of the essentially religious nature of human speech.¹¹

I must express my appreciation for the Thomistic doctrine of analogical language. It has been a helpful model for my students to avoid fundamentalist literalism. I have used it along with Polanyi’s tacit/explicit model of knowing. Only recently has it occurred to me that the two models are incompatible because they assume different ontological models.

The reason for the virtual demise of classical orthodox teaching in major centers of learning today is often attributed to the rationalistic presuppositions of Enlightenment thinking, but it can be argued that the apparent logical contradiction of supernaturalism—which both its proponents and oppo-
nents have defended and assailed—may in part be the real culprit. Father Henri De Lubac even admits that secularism is a consequence of the dualistic tendency of supernaturalism itself.120

As a creative response to Kant's rationalism, Schleiermacher, the father of modern theology, has been blamed for charting the future course of theology down the road of self-destruction,121 but clearly he was seeking to find a way of interpreting the doctrines of Christian faith which did not succumb to the inherent logical conundrums of supernaturalism.122 His reformulation of Christian doctrine seriously wounded orthodoxy, and it has never recovered. Perhaps if Schleiermacher had worked from a different model than his "pantheistic" one, and if he had focused his attention on the need to revise an ontological model which was more in accord with the biblical understanding of God, then the subsequent course of modern and contemporary theology might have been quite different.

Is it right for us to blame the rationalistic presuppositions of Kant and Enlightenment thought in general for the demise of orthodoxy? To be sure, theology since Kant cannot be understood except as an attempt to come to terms with his bifurcated metaphysic which polarized the relations of God and the world. But perhaps the blame for the demise of orthodox Christian doctrines may be more directly related to the supernaturalism in which orthodoxy was enmeshed and less to the actual assaults of Enlightenment rationalism. Kant was only attempting to work out more consistently the philosophical implications of his own pietistic/orthodox training, and in the process of doing so he sought to replace the logical incoherence of orthodox supernaturalism itself with his deistic supernaturalism.

Unfortunately, the orthodox doctrines of classical Christianity and the supernaturalism which eventually came to surround those doctrines have not been sufficiently distinguished with the consequence that orthodox doctrines have often been thrown out along with supernaturalism. What has thus emerged, as a result of confusing a supernaturalistic ontology as the necessary presupposition for understanding the major doctrines of the Christian faith, have been largely ineffective or unduly complex rehabilitations of supernaturalism, or various forms of so-called Christian naturalism which eliminate the essential doctrines which make Christianity truly Christian.

The final implication of supernaturalism may well itself be secularistic naturalism which denies the spiritual dimension altogether. And so long as supernaturalism is still the inherent intellectual framework of Christian doctrines, the secularistic and atheistic critique of Christian faith will continue to hold.

But the collapse of supernaturalism into secularistic naturalism may not prove itself to be the final word. While the secular critique of supernaturalism has validity, secular naturalism may inevitably collapse under the weight of its own critique of supernaturalism. For secular naturalism may
be able to survive only in reference to the supernaturalism which it critiques.

Paul Tillich points out that modern atheism is not paganism; rather, it is "anti-Christian in Christian terms."\(^{123}\) In this respect, modern atheism is really a Christian heresy.

Perhaps the next step beyond secularistic naturalism (if supernaturalism were wiped out) is a revitalized paganism? For the humanistic values which secular naturalism wants to preserve cannot be intellectually substantiated on the same grounds that it says belief in God cannot be accepted—namely, such secularistic values are a mere illusion based on mere psychological need.

The point here is that perhaps supernaturalism may not be an essential component of the orthodox doctrines of Christian faith. In fact, it may be an artificial imposition which Christian faith should dispense with. Perhaps the critique of supernaturalism by secularistic naturalism has performed a useful service for Christian faith by exposing the logical-theological incoherence of a bifurcated worldview.

There may be some truth then to the Death-of-God theology of the 1960s, as well as process theology which has praised Nietzsche for his bold declaration that the God of supernaturalistic theism is dead. Nietzsche’s insight was his perception that a personal God who is so totally other from the world cannot be taken seriously by human beings whose daily concerns are related to personal survival and existential meaning. Such interference by an alien authority only stifles human happiness and leads to a negation of the importance of this world. In defense of human dignity and worth, Nietzsche opposed an unethical concept of a tyrannical God who arbitrarily superimposed His will on frail human beings dominated by fear and guilt.

Of course, supernaturalism did not intend to imply such a truncated and bifurcated view of God and the world. Yet, inadvertently, it did lead (perhaps inevitably) to such an extreme dualism. The doctrine of the Trinity with its emphasis on the temporal development of a historical revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are intimately involved in a loving and redeeming way in the affairs of this world stands in contradiction to a supernaturalistic distancing of God from the world.

What creates spiritual distance from God? Is it God’s spatial transcendence above us in another, alien world? Is this natural world to be despised and downgraded because it is totally depraved and devoid of any inherent goodness? Is it God’s spatial distance from us that defines His holiness and our sinfulness? This misconception of God’s relation to the world, which supernaturalism fosters in spite of itself, is what causes Schubert Ogden to say that “supernaturalism...is in principle an inconsistent and self-stultifying position.”\(^{124}\)

It is significant that the concept of a supernatural distancing of God from the world emerged in the feudalistic society of the Middle Ages where
landowners (lords) lived in isolated and well-protected castles, separated from the rest of the human community. In contrast to the self-serving, tyrannical power of a feudal lord is the shepherding concept of the Lord in the Old Testament (Ps 23:1). Also, the Medieval development of a supernatural ontology which implies tyrannical loftiness over the world is essentially contradictory to its own theology of the God of history whose lordship entails friendship with His subjects (“I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God,” Exod 29:45). The biblical imagery of God being high and lifted up (Isa 6:12) expresses God’s moral, qualitative difference from sinful humanity, rather than a literal, spatial separation of God above the natural world. The history of salvation was the overcoming of this distance in Jesus of Nazareth.

The spatial imagery in Scripture is largely relational in meaning. For example, Jesus’ ascension to His Father is a figure of speech to indicate that Jesus would take up a new relationship with His people through the Pentecostal outpouring of His Holy Spirit. The interpretation of Jesus’ ascension which implies that God resides above or outside the natural universe in a supernatural realm contradicts the relational intent of the biblical spatial imagery. The essential meaning of the ascension is not God’s removal of Himself from us, but rather that a deeper and closer relationship to God is now possible because He dwells “within” His people (John 14:17, Acts 1 and 2). The spatial imagery of the “descent” of the Holy Spirit is a corollary to the imagery of Jesus’ “ascent” to heaven. Of course, this spatial imagery implies divine transcendence, but a supernatural ontology is not the only way to interpret it.

This concept of God dwelling “within” us through the giving of His Spirit to the Church is, of course, not a pantheistic mysticism, for God is other than the world. He transcends us as the power of the unbounded future, but He is immanent because He, as the Future, determines the present course of history. He is infinite; we are finite. We are not distant from God because He is too lofty for us and has to separate Himself from us on a higher plane. Rather, what creates spiritual distance from God whose presence (space) no one can escape (not even in hell, Ps 139:8) is our sinfulness and rebellion against the only possible Source of our being and meaningfulness. It is spiritual distance, not spatial distance, which creates fear and makes us sinners.

That we “feel” distance from God proves that our problem with estrangement from God is a spiritual separation, not a spatial absence of God. If God’s absence was spatial, we would not feel it as such. We would simply be ignorant of His reality. This is the problem with Barth’s supernaturalism: that the natural world is so spatially empty of God that any religious feeling is tinged with human arrogance and is the product of an anthropocentric attempt to create God in our own image. Hence Barth’s capitulation to Feuerbach!

To be sure, God in His triune being is ontologically different from hu-
mans. God alone is self-existent. This is the insight which supernaturalism rightly seeks to capture, but as a model of what is true being, supernaturalism fosters an inherent, self-deprecating attitude as if we are unworthy humans because we are spatially isolated from God in a lower level of (un)reality.

During my doctoral studies, Wolfhart Pannenberg was just beginning to make headlines as a young, contemporary theologian who defied labels and who was calling for a new way of doing theology which would provide for a better understanding of the significance of the God of Jesus. I particularly was impressed with his historical defense of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Most Evangelicals have welcomed his closely reasoned and brilliant argument for the empty tomb and the reality of the appearances of the risen Lord.126

I was also particularly impressed with his eschatological worldview, though I was not sure what to think about his apparent anti-supernaturalism. It was clear that he believed in the distinctly personal character of a transcendent God and he affirmed the reality of the miracle of the Resurrection. I was aware that his remarks against supernaturalism were mostly directed against its two-story approach which pitted each against the other. And I concurred with his rejection of that particular form of supernaturalism.

So I found myself using both a Thomistic model of supernaturalism and Pannenberg’s eschatological ontology as if they could both be incorporated as supplementary views. What suddenly dawned on me (following Pannenberg’s visit to our Asbury Theological Seminary campus) is that the two views are mutually exclusive, even though Pannenberg’s interpretation of Christian doctrines are indeed largely, though not completely, compatible with classical orthodoxy. My growing conviction is that all the major doctrines of traditional Christianity (including the doctrines of biblical inspiration and the Virgin Birth, in contrast to Pannenberg’s own views on these doctrines) are best understood from an eschatological perspective rather than a supernaturalist one.

To understand the implications of Pannenberg’s bold, provocative, creative and apparently biblically based model of reality will require much more time and careful attention by Evangelicals. For now, we can be grateful for his considerable theological contribution. Process theologian John Cobb has said: “It is doubtful that there is another thinker alive today who is as comprehensive in the command of wide-ranging disciplines as Wolfhart Pannenberg.” Cobb thinks Whitehead was the greatest philosopher who ever lived, and “on the process side, only Whitehead himself can compare with Pannenberg.” Cobb further comments: “The single most sustained and thoroughgoing embodiment of this theological response to the decay of modernity is that of Pannenberg. Pannenberg has rethought the relation of Christianity and the Enlightenment profoundly and brilliantly.”127

We can look ahead (to use a good Pannenbergian concept!) to his sys-
tematic theology which is just now being translated into English. My personal expectation is that his eschatological model as a paradigm shift from supernaturalism may well serve as a new beginning for theology (not unlike the new beginning which Schleiermacher's liberal theology initiated). If so, then we can expect a resurgence of the importance of systematic theology which has been slighted by neglect or disdained by our pietistic traditions both among those who are conservative and liberal.

More importantly, this new model for understanding the reality of God is an opportunity for Evangelicals in particular to seize the theological momentum and take the leading role in shaping the way the Church thinks and believes. Evangelicals now have had developed for them a more appropriate onto-theological framework in which the orthodox beliefs can best be understood. The time has come to get off the see-saw of supernaturalism/naturalism and affirm with theological and biblical integrity the coming kingdom of God! Instead of a defensive posture of attacking our past enemies who have compromised the faith, we have before us a challenge to rethink our theology in ways which may prove to be more intellectually compelling and spiritually renewing.

Notes

2. Paul Tillich everywhere used supranaturalism, as seen in the index of Systematic Theology, three volumes in one (The University of Chicago Press, 1971).
4. Ibid.
9. Knox, Above or Within, p. 23
16. Ibid., 2:189-190.
17. Ibid., 2:190.
28. Vitezslav Gardavsky, God Is Not Yet Dead, trans. Vivenne Menkes (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973), p. 28; Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper, 1963), pp. 53-69. Cf. E. L. Mascall, The Importance of Being Human, pp. 38-39, who writes: "The concept of personality is not, of course, confined to Christianity or even to the Judaeo-Christian revelation, but it is very significant that it was only when it entered into theology, through the controversies in the early Church about the nature of God, that its full content and implications
became manifest....The idea of personality was present in Greek thought only in embryo, and to this day it is practically absent from Hinduism and Buddhism."

29. Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, pp. 44-46. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1929), p. 147, where he says: "The order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there."


33. Pannenberg's forthcoming volumes in systematic theology intend to focus on this problem and to show that God's nature is to be understood primarily in terms of the trinitarian persons rather than in a monarchical obsession with the oneness of God's being. In this regard, his trinitarian refocusing of theology may take us back to a more radical biblical understanding of God's personal makeup even as his eschatologicalism attempts to give us a more biblical understanding of God's relation with creation. Cf. *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Company, 1988), p. 327.

34. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 139.


42. Ibid., 2:242.

43. Ibid., 2:191-192.

44. Ibid., 2:193.

45. Ibid., 2:202.

46. Ibid., 2:194-195.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 2:195.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 2:241.

51. Ibid., 2:11.

52. Ibid., 2:9-10.
53. Ibid., 2:10-11.
54. Ibid., 2:3.
58. Ibid. 2:20.
62. Ibid., 2:22.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 2:23. Pannenberg denies he is a Hegelian (The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, p. 16).
65. Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, 2:27.
66. Ibid., 2:242.
68. Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, 2:236.
69. Ibid., 2:248.
73. Pannenberg, Jesus—God and Man, p. 130.
74. Eberhard Jüngel, The Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 15.
75. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 1:1, X.
76. Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, 2:249.
78. Ibid., p. 52.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., p. 67.
82. Ibid., p. 60.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., p. 53.
85. Ibid., p. 55-56.
86. Pannenberg, Theology as History, pp. 116-117.
87. Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, 2:244.
88. Pannenberg, Theology and the Kingdom of God, p. 62.
89. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
90. Ibid.
91. Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:235, 244-245.
92. Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, 2:236.
93. Ibid., 2:246.
95. Ibid., p. 64.
96. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 269.
97. Ibid.
100. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 267n.
102. Ibid., p. 135.
104. Pannenberg, *Theology as History*, p. 133.
105. Ibid., p. 260.
106. Ibid., p. 242.
108. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid., p. 253.
113. Ibid., p. 255.
121. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1:X.
124. Ogden, p. 46.
125. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1:X.
128. His choice of William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company as his publisher was in part influenced because of its large Evangelical constituency (a comment Professor Pannenberg made to this writer when he visited Asbury Theological Seminary on April 18-19, 1991).