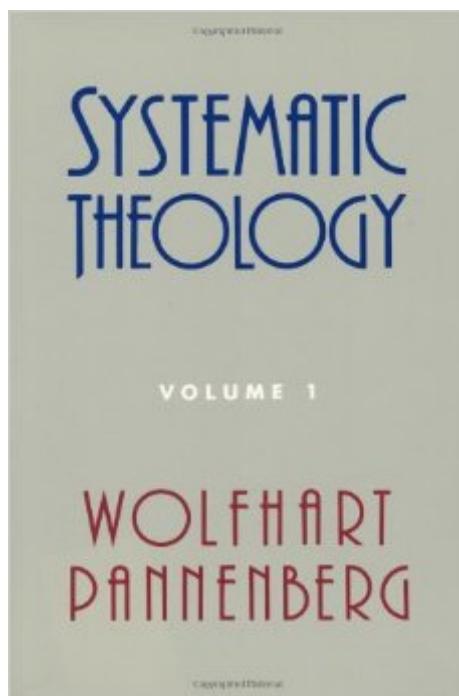


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# Systematic Theology (Volume 1)



## Synopsis

Marked by a creative blend of philosophical, historical, anthropological, and exegetical analysis, this volume focuses on the Christian doctrine of God, offering original material on the concept of truth, the nature of revelation, language about God, the nature of the Trinity, and the public aspect of theology.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The monolithic learning displayed by Wolfhart Pannenberg is incredibly focused and lucid in this, the first volume of his systematic theology. Dealing heavily with prolegomenal issues (though not necessarily in the traditional sense) Pannenberg delves into the historical understandings of revelation, religion, God, The Trinity, and the attributes of God. Pannenberg is a highly original thinker who has not been conversed with in American theology as heavily as his genius may warrant, but who has nonetheless irrevocably changed the penumbra in which we perform the task of systematic, historical, and philosophical theology. For anyone familiar with Pannenberg's other works, when he commits to explaining something, he is exhaustively thorough (steeped especially in German and Lutheran thought, though the spectrum of his program is highly ecumenical.) The only complaint I may really levy against Pannenberg is the seeming absence of dialogue with Continental and Anglo-American postmoderns (e.g the Deconstructionism of Derrida, or the Post-Metaphysical thought of Marion, or others such as Wittgenstein, Foucault, Ricouer, Fish, etc...)

Nor does there seem to be any interaction with the so called "Yale," school--as tenuous as that marker may be-- with either Frei or Lindbeck, who, it would seem, would indeed present challenges to Pannenbergs eminantly historical/correspondance understanding of the biblical representation of and eschatologically oriented historical process, as opposed to Lindbeck's understanding of doctrine being a linguistic system, or Frei's now famous theory that the Bible is "history like," and should be read on the terms of the text itself rather than as historical/reconstructivist document.Pannenbergs however, does adopt and modify the program set up by Gadamer's "meta-critical" approach to hermeneutics, seeing all of human knowledge as finite and situated in the historical process, so that true understanding will only come with the Eschaton's consummation. This essential relationship between understanding part/whole, and the interplay (what some would call a modified version of the hermeneutical circle used for the process of history) between tradition interpreting current experience, which in turn sheds new light on past events, culminates in what Pannenbergs sees a proleptic disclosure of the eschaton in Christ. So that Christ, as the future of the world, is already a power in the world shaping the future that He is. Rather than understanding the Word of God (as is traditional) as God's self-revelation (in the sense that most would take from Barth, of a God who is directly self-revealing or unfolding) the primary content of the Word is never God Himself, but always directly about us and our world, and then secondarily or indirectly about God. In Pannenbergs opinion this allows for the multiplicity of forms that revelation and the Word of God takes, but also for the integration of new experience, which Pannenbergs adopts from a synthesis (and evolution) from both Hegel's understanding of History as a whole, and schliermacher's understanding that the contents of any finite experience are always "carved out of the infinite," so that meta-critically, religions see the implicit context of any given moment as it is in relation to the greater whole, the Universum or the Infinite. Here also, Pannenbergs gives greater coherence to Descarte's ontologism of retroactive significance of our at first "nonthematic perception of the infinite, from which we understand all finite things through attributing limitation." Here, we do not fully initially perceive God as God, but as a nonthematic infinite that comprehends, unifies, and inter-relates the nexus of experience. Only later do we attribute the significance of God to this Universum, and thereby recognize that God was always present even if we did not know Him as such (e.g. when the Lord gives the divine name in exodus 3, the patriarch to whom he refers himself for his identity to moses knew God as El'Shaddai but not as YHWH) Hence the significance of this thought means that the Christian God, as the GOd of the heavens, is either the basic or foundational (perhaps maybe even more rightly transcendental) or a delusion. Here to we see hints of Pannenbergs deep involvement in Field Physics in his second volume, for Pannenbergs believes

we cannot rightly understand anything without reference to God. In the last sections of the book, Pannenberg deals with the Trinity. He criticizes rightly the traditional Latin models, of attempting to derive the Trinity from God's unity as Spirit (e.g. the tradition developed from Augustine's *mens*, *notitia*, and *amore*, as in Peter Lombard, even up to Barth who sees God as Revealer, Revealed, and Revelation) because this seems to collapse into Sabellianism as it assumes a single underlying subject. Nor does Richard of St. Victor's adoption of Augustine's understanding of a God who Loves Himself fully, where God-as-His-own-object exists aside God as the God who loves Himself, and where also the Love between them is given hypostatic and ontological personhood, because this again assumes the beginning (even if only logically rather than temporally) of a single subject, and the other two being secondary or subordinate, thus falling into what has been traditionally called "subordinationism." Rather, as is well known, Pannenberg has a "ground up" approach that starts with Jesus' relation to the Father, where He submits to the Father and distinguishes Himself, allowing the Father to be God in Distinction to Himself. Just so (and of course I am butchering Pannenberg's brilliant scholarship here, so read the book if you aren't satisfied with my feeble attempt) God the Father is such everywhere only in relation to Jesus, so, borrowing from Athanasius, the Father would not be Father without the Son. Conversely, of course, the Son is not Son without the Father as Father, so precisely in subordinating himself (economically, of course) he allows the Father to be Fatherly, and so is Himself Son in this instance (which opens up quite a lot of possibilities for explaining how the kenosis operated.) When Christ was crucified, his identification of the Son was jeopardized in this supposed defeat, and so, since the Father is God only in relation to this Son, the Father's identity as king on earth was questioned, and so both are referred to the operations of the Spirit, who is precisely the power and person of their "future", who raises Christ and identifies him truly as Son, and so the Father truly as Father. Again, I am leaving out a lot of quality insight... The final part of this book, I will leave you with, is the attributes of God interpreted through the interactions of the community of the Triune Godhead. These operations are explained through Pannenberg's adoption of the Hegelian "true infinite." In traditional terms the infinite was seen as that which was opposed to the finite (in neo-platonic via negationis and apophatic theology etc...) but in this way the infinite is defined against or separated from the finite, and so is itself having boundaries and just so not finite. The true infinite transcends its own antithesis to the finite, comprehending the finite in its place and so being truly infinite. Thus, for example, the incarnation is an actualization of the infinity of God, where He is not merely "above" us, but greets us in our own condition (this is an important reaction to traditional theology which bases its attributes on causality rather than action. Just so, Pannenberg reacts to

hyper-apophaticism saying that pure transcendence in terms of say, Paul Tillich's "Being itself," cannot exist, because transcendence itself expresses a relation, so a being that we know is totally unknown or beyond predication is a contradiction...) All in all, this is an enormous book that I recommend for anyone seeking to go beyond traditional expositions on theology.

I noticed that no one seemed to supply the table of contents for Vol. 1, and so I thought it would be helpful to provide that here. As an interesting side note, I've heard from some friends that Pannenberg is a wonderful preacher. I'd be curious to hear how he brings works like this to those entrusted to his care. Not light reading, can be a bit dry, but worth it.

**CONTENTS:**

- Abbreviations
- Foreword
- Chapter 1 The Truth of Christian Doctrine as the Theme of Systematic Theology
- Theology
- The Truth of Dogma
- Dogmatics as Systematic Theology
- The Development and Problem of So-called Prolegomena to Dogmatics
- The Truth of Christian Doctrine as the Theme of Systematic Theology
- Chapter 2 The Concept of God and the Question of Its Truth
- The Word "God"
- Natural Knowledge of God and Natural Theology
- The Proofs of God and Philosophical Criticism of Natural Theology
- Theological Criticism of Natural Theology
- The "Natural" Knowledge of God
- Chapter 3 The Reality of God and the Gods in the Experience of the Religions
- The Concept of Religion and Its Function in Theology
- a. Religion and the Knowledge of God
- b. The Concept of Religion, the Plurality of Religions, and the "Absoluteness" of Christianity
- The Anthropological and Theological Nature of Religion
- The Question of the Truth of Religion and the History of Religion
- The Religious Relation
- Chapter 4 The Revelation of God
- The Theological Function of the Concept of Revelation
- The Multiplicity of Biblical Ideas of Revelation
- The Function of the Concept of Revelation in the History of Theology
- Revelation as History and as Word of God
- Chapter 5 The Trinitarian God
- The God of Jesus and the Beginnings of the Doctrine of the Trinity
- The Place of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Dogmatic Structure and the Problem of Finding a Basis for Trinitarian Statements
- Distinction and Unity of the Divine Persons
- a. The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the Starting Point, and the Traditional Terminology of the Doctrine of the Trinity
- b. The Reciprocal Self-Distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit as the Concrete Form of Trinitarian Relations
- c. Three Persons but only One God
- Chapter 6 The Unity and Attributes of the Divine Essence
- The Majesty of God and the Task of Rational Discussion of Talk about God
- The Distinction between God's Essence and Existence
- God's Essence and Attributes and the Link between Them in Action
- God's Spirituality, Knowledge, and Will
- The Concept of Divine Action
- The Structure of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes
- The Infinity of God: His Holiness, Eternity, Omnipotence, and Omnipresence
- a. The Infinity and Holiness of God
- b. The Eternity of

God c. The Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God~The Love of God a. Love and Trinity b.

Attributes of the Divine Love c. The Unity of

GodIndexes~~~~~Subjects~~~~~Names~~~~~Scripture ReferencesAnd there is the Table of  
Contents, for those strange folks, like me, who enjoy seeing these things before we dive in.

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