

[MJTM 17 (2015–2016)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Stanley J. Grenz. *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. v + 318 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-802-84909-0. \$35.00

Stanley Grenz wrote the first edition of this book on Wolfhart Pannenberg, his mentor, before the publication of Pannenberg's three-volume magnum opus *Systematic Theology*. Grenz used materials that Pannenberg had given in lecture form at the University of Munich in 1987–1988. However, Grenz writes that, for the updated edition of this work, the material used in the first edition would be “compared with the English translation of Pannenberg's completed three-volume dogmatics” (4–5). Grenz's aim in this second edition is threefold: (1) to introduce Pannenberg's mature systematic thought; (2) to place Pannenberg's theology in accordance with the methodology and emphases he utilizes in his other works; and (3) to “interact with the discussion that Pannenberg's writings have generated” (5). It is clear that Grenz seeks to update the previous edition of this book to incorporate materials from Pannenberg's three-volume *Systematic Theology* and to engage in the academic dialogue stemming from Pannenberg's theology.

Upon stating the need for an updated version of his previous work, Grenz begins by laying out the theological methodology in Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*. In his chapter entitled, “Pannenberg's Approach to the Dogmatic Enterprise,” Grenz writes that, for Pannenberg, theology is “the quest for universal truth” (13). Pannenberg's quest for universal truth is guided by historical argumentation. For this reason, Pannenberg uses the notion of history to validate many aspects of his thought. However, Pannenberg's emphasis upon historical argumentation does not mean that he is doing theology in a pre-modern fashion.

Instead, Pannenberg's emphasis upon historical argumentation coupled with his notion of eschatology leads him to define truth in a unique manner. In fact, Grenz writes, "Truth, he [Pannenberg] claims, is not found in the constant and unchanging essences lying behind the flow of time but is essentially historical and ultimately eschatological. Until the *eschaton*, truth will by its own nature always remain provisional, and truth claims contestable" (14). In other words, truth is provisional until history is given meaning at the end of time. It is at the completion of history that truth claims will be validated. However, the provisionality of truth does not necessitate that truth cannot be known. In fact, Grenz points out that "Pannenberg views Christianity as more clearly related to the revelation of God and therefore finds other religions as 'provisional forms' of the 'divine answer' to the human question" (43). Grenz correctly points out that, for Pannenberg, the Christian conception of God is significant "because this conception more than others is able to illumine experience, including the religious struggle itself" (43). In other words, Pannenberg's conceptions of historical argumentation, eschatology, and truth do not render Christian theology as incapable of understanding truth. Instead, as Grenz points out, Pannenberg's aim is to show how the Christian conception of God and his revelation in history is able to illuminate humanity's experience and to bring an understanding of the unity of history.

Grenz clearly depicts how Pannenberg's theological methodology affects other doctrines in his theology. In the chapter entitled, "The Doctrine of God," Grenz clearly shows how Pannenberg's emphasis upon the notion of history shapes this doctrine. In fact, Grenz writes that "the question of the unity of the trinitarian God cannot be answered from the perspective of God's essence apart from the mutual relationship of the three persons and, in relation to the world, not apart from the economy of salvation" (69). Grenz later writes that, for Pannenberg, "the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are bound together" (69). What Grenz has clearly pointed out is how Pannenberg's emphasis upon the notion of history leads Pannenberg to steer away from venturing into the essence of God apart from what he

has revealed in his interactions with creation in history. Furthermore, Grenz points out that, for Pannenberg, “the existence of the world makes the deity of the Father dependent on the *historical* work of the Son and the eschatological work of the Spirit” (emphasis added, 95). Grenz clearly shows how Pannenberg’s emphasis of history leads to a radical understanding of the equating of the immanent and economic Trinity. Later in this book, Grenz clearly indicates the connections Pannenberg draws between the doctrine of God and Christology. Pannenberg’s Christology is a consistent outworking of his notion of history and his doctrine of God. As a result, Grenz points out that Pannenberg is “interested in establishing the unique position of Jesus . . . Jesus’ deity is not abstracted from his life as an individual human being but lies in his uniqueness as a human who is obedient to the Father” (185). For Pannenberg, the deity of Christ is not something that is to be abstracted from history. Instead, Jesus’ whole life points to his divinity, and the resurrection is a retroactive confirmation of Jesus’ unity with the Father. Grenz’s chapter on Pannenberg’s Christology clearly points out how Pannenberg’s Christology is a consistent product of the emphasis he places on the notion of history and his doctrine of God.

Grenz also devotes a chapter to Pannenberg’s doctrine of creation and humanity. In this chapter, Grenz outlines a number of the distinctives within Pannenberg’s doctrine of creation and humanity. From these various distinctives, Grenz points out that Pannenberg’s doctrine of creation is unique in that in “contrast to traditional Protestant theology, Pannenberg does not quarantine the doctrine of the Spirit to a specific section within his systematic theology” (106). In fact, Grenz writes, “Creatures participate in God through the Spirit . . . In this sense the Spirit may be understood as the environmental network or ‘field’ in which and from which creatures live” (113). This is crucial for Pannenberg, because “The Spirit is the ‘force’ that lifts creatures above their environment and orients them toward the future” (113). Although some may be critical of what seems like a complete appropriation of a scientific concept in describing the Spirit, the author carefully addresses these criticisms to show

how Pannenberg's aim is not merely to borrow concepts from science, but to show how the necessary function of creaturely participation in God stems from the active Spirit in creation. Pannenberg's emphasis of the Spirit in creation ultimately shows how creation and humanity participate in God through the Spirit and depicts how the Spirit allows all of creation to be open to the future.

The author's chapter on Pannenberg's ecclesiology is especially helpful in its recognition of the importance of ecclesiology to Pannenberg's theological project. The author points out that Pannenberg's "most important contribution to this endeavor lies in the emphasis on the kingdom of God as the context for the description of the church. This moves the discussion away from alternatives oriented toward either the past . . . or the present . . . and toward the future" (251). Although Pannenberg's ecclesiology has not received the attention that his other doctrines have received, Grenz's chapter clearly shows that Pannenberg's ecclesiology can bring about fruitful ecumenical dialogue in Pannenberg's eschatologically-shaped ecclesiology.

Throughout this book, Grenz carefully connects the different doctrines in Pannenberg's thought and how Pannenberg's theology is a consistent outworking of his emphasis on history and the meaning history will receive at the *eschaton*. The author's chapter on Pannenberg's eschatology summarizes the significance of how many of the doctrines of Pannenberg's theology are shaped largely by eschatology.

The author of this work succeeds in introducing the reader to Pannenberg's theology and in understanding the impulse of his theology. However, Grenz's aim to interact with the discussions surrounding Pannenberg's theology may not completely satisfy Pannenberg's critics. For instance, the author notes that Pannenberg's idea of self-actualization of God has received a lot of criticism. In fact, Grenz engages Roger Olson's critique of Pannenberg's idea of the self-actualization of God. Grenz defends Pannenberg and points out that "The problem that Olson distills from several essays, however, is overcome in the dogmatics by appeal to God as *causa sui* . . . Rather, the process of God's self-actualization in the world is but the revelation in

the history of the world of the eternal self-actualization of God found in the intratrinitarian life” (186). Although Grenz finds Pannenberg’s theology defensible at this point, critics may wonder if the distinction between God’s life in himself and God’s interactions with the created order are being blurred in Pannenberg’s theology. Furthermore, if God’s eternal self-actualization takes place in the arena of history that is found in the intratrinitarian life of God, then the affirmation of God’s aseity becomes difficult to affirm. Although Grenz is correct to disassociate Pannenberg’s work from that of process theology, Grenz’s defense of Pannenberg does not take Olson’s criticism seriously enough. For this reason, critics of Pannenberg may find Grenz’s engagement of Pannenberg’s critics lacking in some respects.

Despite the criticisms put forth in this review, this book on Pannenberg shows a clear understanding of Pannenberg’s theology and clearly depicts how many of the doctrines are connected to each other within Pannenberg’s thought. Although critics of Pannenberg may feel like their criticisms were not taken seriously enough, this book skillfully introduces Pannenberg’s theology and displays the complexity and the logic within Pannenberg’s theology.

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