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A View of W. Pannenberg's Misery and Dignity of Humanity

SUMMARY. This discussion on W. Pannenberg focuses on humanity as it relates to destiny of fellowship and how the love for one another influences the recognition of dignity. His idea dwells on the Biblical account of human creation in the image and likeness of God with a mandate to live in dominion (Gen 1: 26–28) alongside Paul's idea of our redemption in Christ. The divine likeness of God is the destiny of fellowship which keeps us from the misery of sin so that we can conform to the image of Christ. Divine fellowship with God helps us to live in dominion as His earthly reagent which helps our understanding of the love for one another helps our understanding of our God-given human dignity.

KEYWORDS: W. Pannenberg, misery and dignity, humanity, Christology, God's image, and likeness.

Introduction

Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014, Germany) was a systematic theologian whose ideas expressed a deep interest in understanding the existence of humanity. The aftermath of WW II influenced his anthropological dimension of humanity to be recognized as God's esteemed creation. His idea of human destiny relates to God's desire for divine fellowship with a purpose for humanity to live in dignity. We cannot achieve a destiny without respect for dignity giving us a reason for love for one another dependent on the knowledge of God through divine fellowship. W. Pannenberg believes God expects humanity to live in dignity but our finiteness means we cannot escape misery as a consequence of sin. Christ's redemption of humanity helps us overcome sin to fulfil divine destiny for the purpose of reconciling us back to God's original plan for us at creation.

Humanity and Destiny of Fellowship

W. Pannenberg starts by dwelling on how destiny of fellowship with God which help us to recognize our invaluable personalities bestowed on humanity as the apex of His creation.

The destiny of fellowship with God confers inviolability on human life in the person of each individual. It is the basis of the inalienable dignity of each human person.¹

Destiny of fellowship helps us to understand we are God's esteemed creation with glory and honour (Psalm 8: 4, Hebrews 2: 6). The destiny of fellowship requires us to be conformed to God's likeness and in that process, we find expression in our human dignity which will be difficult outside the redemption of Christ. Sin truncates the destiny of fellowship and exposes our humanity to vices against our openness to God's consciousness which helps us to recognise the dignity of humanity. It is through this that we understand the origin of dignity as God-given and not the society thereby giving us a moral obligation to embrace humankind as people created equally in God's image. W. Pannenberg's idea shows that destiny of fellowship helps us spiritually and as social beings to understand God's supremacy and why he made us distinct from other beings.² Failure to understand the destiny of fellowship will cause us to struggle to achieve our goals in life. To live in dominion on earth cannot be achieved without destiny of fellowship because our finite nature will not allow us to attain the divine destiny expected by God from us as His vicars on earth.

For W. Pannenberg, our destiny of fellowship with God is divine life after the likeness of His Son Jesus. This helps us discover our likeness in Him and also gives us dignity as humans who are the epitome of His creation.

Yet according to 2 Cor 4:4, the likeness of God in the human form found manifestation only in Jesus Christ. In Him alone do we see that our destiny of fellowship with God is the point of divine likeness, which Genesis 9:6 adduces as a basis for the inviolability of the human person and therefore human dignity³.

The likeness of God to W. Pannenberg focuses on the expression of the divine attribute of Christ of humanity helps us fulfil dominion which makes us esteemed above other creations. Dignity relates to our uniqueness that was bestowed on us at

¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*. Vol II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 176.

² Ibid., 175.

³ Ibid., 175.

the creation of humanity by God. The destiny of fellowship is the divine likeness of God that gives us an understanding of the uniqueness of our dignity. Through the life of Christ as God's incarnate on earth (Romans 8: 3), we learn to live on earth in dignity with respect for humanity as God's creation. Destiny of fellowship helps us to portray God's wisdom in the manner of Christ with dominion as gods on earth. God's original divine likeness means that humans have dominion on earth (Gen 1: 27–28) with the help of His divine wisdom. God does not disregard our earthly goals but He desires us to emulate Christ's salvation to reconnect us back to Him spiritually. Our Adamic finiteness could not guarantee our divine likeness in God except through the divine nature of Christ which we discovered in our destiny of fellowship with God. Our dignity was redeemed by Christ's salvation of humanity from the misery of sin in Adam which gives us the consciousness that we are God's masterpiece on earth. We must always be in divine fellowship with God or else be alienated from His wisdom to express this dignity. The absence of divine likeness in our humanity will give rise to individualism in us because we have failed to attain God's expectations which will affect divine destiny as expected by God in our earthly life.

W. Pannenberg's emphasis on Christology in relation to destiny of fellowship is to show God's plan to save His precious creation whom He created in His image and likeness. Through Christ, we can fellowship with God and are transformed into His image as Christ was revealed as the Son of God. The creation of humankind was pivotal to God's quest for a destiny of fellowship and this is what gives us self-identity. Christ's redemption agenda for humanity is to restore the identity that was robbed by sin in Adam to bring us back to God's image so that we can also become sons just like Jesus Christ.

The fellowship with God mediated through Jesus Christ can mean redemption only on the condition that we thereby become free. This is so when fellowship with God helps us to self-identity, and this in turn presupposes that we are destined by nature for fellowship with God. This destiny is the subject of the doctrine of our creation in the image of God.⁴

The fellowship with God helps us to discover ourselves and His purpose for us in life because He does not want us detached from the redemption in Christ required for our dominion. Christ became God's image on earth with the mandate of our eternal redemption and he also addressed the social issues through divine wisdom guiding us from derailing God's image. The fellowship is a spiritual belonging to God that helps in discovering our goal in life by emulating the life of Christ. The plan of God for creation will help the human society to understand God's original plan for us starting from when Adam was created to Christ's redemption for humanity. We therefore cannot

⁴ Ibid., 180.

exclude the social life of humankind from emulating Christ if we want to gain the full experience of our existence in God. The fellowship with God apart from spiritual intimacy also gives us an identity that makes us understand our earthly life. By destiny of fellowship, we are also part of God's image in Christ Jesus which we could not achieve in our imperfect Adamic nature. The human destiny outside Christ falls short of our redemption in Christ. While the Old Testament focuses on our intimacy with God as his esteemed creation, the New Testament uses the life of Christ as a pattern for us to follow to attain our destiny in life. The life of Christ helps keep us from being alienated from God due to the fulfilment of His desires in our lives. For W. Pannenberg, humanity is expected to live in dominion as part of what makes us esteemed above other creatures (Genesis 1: 26–28) because we were created with glory and honor (Psalm 8).⁵ This dominion helps us to recognize our basic rights to life, and property as described in the Bible.

We portray divine likeness through divine fellowship with God which helps us to live in dominion as we manifest His kingdom on earth (Hebrews 2: 5–9). Our human finiteness makes it impossible for us to overcome sin and divine fellowship helps us to be aligned with God's desire for our destiny. It is through divine likeness that helps us to portray God's image through His Son Jesus Christ who despite God was also in human form but lived without sin.

Divine likeness thus means sharing in God's wisdom and righteousness, which also means fellowship with his incorruptible being <...> the glory of Adam before the invasion of the world by sin and death. The Pauline message about Christ, however, relates such statements, along with what they say about divine likeness, to the manifestation of the image of God in Christ.⁶

For W. Pannenberg, as we follow the life of Christ we also share in God's wisdom and in sanctification with the power to overcome sin so that He can direct our actions. The consequences of Adam's sin removed our natural abilities to attain God's wisdom and righteousness except through God's grace in Christ. The divine likeness is manifested as a spiritual expression of God helping us to live above sin and also fulfil destiny without derailing from His supreme direction as our creator.⁷ Adam lost his immortality due to sin and became detached from God's presence. Our divine likeness cannot be sustained by our humanity due to sinful desires except for Christ's redemption which gives us the ability to live in dominion on earth. We can relate this to Paul's expression of Christ as the image of God in which when we accept and remain in Christ we also transform into God's image. The purpose of creation was

⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁷ Ibid., 201. See also, Werner H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener-Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1964), 133–139.

based on God's desire for us to live in dominion (Genesis 1: 26–28) but the Adamic nature becomes opposition to this except for our redemption in Christ “eschatological new man who is manifested in Jesus Christ”⁸ This means we can have dominion over the power of sin and death just as Christ was made manifest as God's eternal image.

W. Pannenberg believed Barth's idea of co-humanity was not the goal of humanity but that through Christ we achieve the full image of God. The purpose of Christ was beyond His humanity despite it being part of the process of our redemption but to reconcile us to God's image which is to be in unending fellowship with God spiritually.

Barth finds in co-humanity a parable of our destiny of fellowship with God but one that is not perceptible in and of itself a reality which encloses it, and therefore conceals no less than discloses it, and discloses it only when it is expressed by the grace and revelation of God, and in the knowledge of faith thereby awakened.⁹

Barth's idea shows our destiny is assigned by God and it is through divine fellowship, that humanity fulfils its purpose in life. Christ was God's incarnate in human form who lived like us on earth with the knowledge of God yet without sin. The destiny of fellowship is God's desire for us to become sons just like Jesus Christ but the goal of Christ was not in co-humanity but in His redemption of humanity in the resurrection in which He attained the full image of God. This is God's desire for us that our future should also follow after Christ in attaining the full image of Christ in the resurrection which is victory over the misery of sin and death. Barth's idea sees God's initial intention for us as it relates to a divine likeness when he created Adam in a form of fellowship which was not achieved.¹⁰ Despite the fall of Adam, God wants to restore the fellowship with us and that was the purpose he made the Ten Commandments to reconcile Israel to Himself. The obligation for Christians means we have to conform to God's likeness through divine fellowship so as to live in dominion as gods on earth embracing all both social and spiritual attributes of Christ in our earthly life.

The Misery of Humanity outside God

The focus on misery refers to human separation from God's presence in which we cannot escape God's judgement except through fellowship with God. Our finiteness

⁸ Ibid., 205; 208. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, third edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 226–227.

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation*. Vol III/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 189–321; —, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation*. Part 1, Vol. 3.1 (UK: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 2000).

makes us prone to individualism which is common to humanity due to the sin of Adam. Misery is the consequence of sin against God's command such as the love of the neighbour as oneself and the love of God.

The term misery sums up our detachment from God, our autonomy, and all the resultant consequences. It brings out more clearly than the term sin <...> the term alienation has a similar breadth <...> we can alienate ourselves from someone, and we also be in a state of alienation <...> To Augustine, misery means being deprived of what we desire and love <...> But many people also experience the misery of striving after that which in truth is not worth loving <...> The reason for this misery, however, is the sin of turning from God, for those who do not serve God are miserable because they are robbed of fellowship with God.¹¹

Misery in this situation alienates us from the presence of God when we are exposed to sin and we find ourselves acting against His will, and therefore our dignity is detached from Him. This is different from physical misery which focuses on the deprivation of something that we desire. Our actions when trying to fulfil our earthly goal can lead to misery as long as it is out of God's righteousness. Augustine's idea shows that we are prone to sin due to the Adamic nature in us as long as we exist in natural life.¹² Misery could also impact negatively on our earthly goals because we would not be able to do them with God's desire for our dignity. This makes us unfulfilled in our own abilities as humans and the solution to misery would be our openness to God to discover our purpose in life. Our openness to God pushes us away from misery through divine fellowship and also gives us the knowledge of spiritual life to God and social life in society.

W. Pannenberg explained that faith in Christ helps us to avoid sin because it gives us awareness of what God expects from His creation. It is our knowledge of God that reveals to us what is sin or righteousness and not our human reality. This might be misunderstood to mean a lack of knowledge of God in Christ exempted people of other religions as regards who defines sin. W. Pannenberg believes "Hence, those who have not attained faith in Christ are not thereby freed from the tie to the corruption in the structure of their conduct to which word sin refers".¹³ Humanity can only be free from the desire for sin inherent in our nature by accepting the grace of God unto salvation in Christ. Since there is no universal moral law that guides our actions, those who depend on human reality are confined by their desires. The idea of sin

¹¹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 178.

¹² Augustine, "Fallen Human Nature", in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister Mc Grath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 219. See also: John H. Taylor, "The Text of Augustine's De Genesi Ad Litteram", *Speculum* 1, Vol 25 (Chicago University Press, 1950).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 236.

as departing from faith presupposes individual actions even though the groups like Socinians believed God is not unjust to punish us for the sin of Adam.¹⁴ If our actions lack God's knowledge, the likelihood exists that evil desires cloud our judgment to do good. W. Pannenberg believed G. Freund agreed with the idea of Christ's atonement in redeeming humankind from sin.¹⁵ This is also vital in Paul's writings in overcoming the hold of sin through the atonement of Christ on the cross. The emphasis on Romans 5: 10–14 directs us to how sin entered humankind through Adam's action in Eden and how God's plan of redeeming humanity from sin was not achieved through the Law of Moses. Sin brings about death which separates us from God's glory which is a constant struggle with our finite nature. God's redemption plan to overcome the misery of sin is in Christology with the purpose to restore us to fellowship so that we can attain the fullness of His glory have defeat death through resurrection.

W. Pannenberg believed the Old Testament prophets, including David, prayed for a clean heart and often pleaded with the people to redirect their hearts back away from sin to Him.¹⁶ Sin depicts the wickedness in the human heart (Genesis 6: 5) which is a rebellion against the law or an expected norm. W. Pannenberg believed the law was meant to prevent evil desires from sin and was given to Israel so that they could align their heart to God as their creator and also establish a social order fashioned after God's consciousness.

The summing up of all the law's commandments is one commandment "Thou shalt not covet" (Rom 7: 7 shows us the perverted nature of sin, i.e., evil desire. More precisely sin, sin expresses itself in desires that are against the commands of God and therefore the God who issues them <...> The Pauline understanding gave orientation to the Christian doctrine of sin. Most of the fathers, at any rate, saw in desire the consequence of Adam's transgression and therefore a punishment, the fall of Adam having damaged or destroyed the dominion over the affection that we enjoyed under the direction of divine grace. Yet this is not what Paul himself said. In Rom 7: 7 the condition as such is already an expression of sin.¹⁷

W. Pannenberg believed Christ came to rescue humanity from the hold of the Law, but the law existed to create to make sin visible but does not confine us to being a sinner except if it is disobeyed. Without the Law, life would be void of sin but we would be controlled by our desires in the pursuance of our goals. Sin resulted in the need for the law as we often noticed Israel worshipped strange gods and also individualism arose

¹⁴ Faustus Socinus, *Praelectiones theologicae* (Racov 1609), ch 4, 10ff, quoted in: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*. Vol II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 236.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

towards each other's neighbour. The Law in accordance with the Bible was aimed to redirect us back to God without ignoring our social life as seen in the Ten Commandment which focused on the love of God and the neighbour. The Ten Commandments could not prevent the people from sinning with two of the commandments emphasizing covetousness as a human struggle. The evil desires that manifest in us result from the urge to sin from our Adamic nature, but this can be stopped through the divine grace of God in Christ. The Law was hard to obey and was restricted to the people of Israel, while Paul's letters showed God's grace in Christ was given to all humanity. The grace of God in Christ Jesus does not condemn the law but enables us to obey God and also love others based on His divine help. It is the Spirit of Christ in us that gives us the grace to abstain from coveting those things prohibited by God. Our redemption in Christ also means we can always depend on the inward power of God to overcome covetousness which makes us disobey God's commands. The Law of God is not just fixed on the Ten Commandments but the knowledge of God in the Bible as God's moral law to help us live in alignment with our destiny of fellowship as our goal in life.

W. Pannenberg believes sin keeps us outside God's commands to depend on our rationality but eventually ends us in death by alienating us from God's promise of abundant life. Sustenance of life will involve us getting rid of covetousness in our human nature because it gives us false hope of fulfilment outside God's law.

The power of sin over us humans rests on the fact that it promises us life, a fuller and richer life. As we have said, this is its deception (Rom 7: 11). Only thus can we explain Paul's statement that sin can use the law as a view to life. Keeping it should help us to safeguard the life that we have received from God (Deut 32: 47, Lev 18: 5).¹⁸

We are able to overcome sin and death by dwelling on the good intentions of the law which is for the sustainability of life rather than as a burden. The Law of God helps us understand the knowledge of God and His promises for our life but adhering to the Law is burdensome¹⁹. Our desire for individualism outside the Law, makes us depend on the law of reason and traditional morals in search of life's fulfilment but it pushed us into sin and alienated us from God's purpose²⁰. Regardless of the burden of the Law, we understand through Paul, that the Law was given for our good to deliver us from death to life (Romans 7: 11–12, 6: 23).²¹ The life in support of Paul as makes us understand it

¹⁸ Ibid., 265.

¹⁹ Ibid., 265.

²⁰ Ibid., 265. See also, Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 54ff; Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*. Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 147ff.

²¹ Bornkamm, Günther. *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper and Raw, 1969), 51ff., esp. 54ff. See also: Wilckens, Ulrich. *Der Brief an die Römer* (Benziger, Neukirchener Verlag, Zürich: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978), 81ff.

is given by God while sin disconnects us from life which results in death.²² Although the origin of physical death is associated as part of our mortal experience, death is an alienation that pushes us further away from God. The idea of sin by Paul (Romans 5: 12) revealed it made physical death inevitable over our humanity starting from the time of Adam.²³ This shortened mortal life means our stay on earth is limited giving us the need to desire a much better life which we could not achieve physically but in seeking the resurrection of new life in Christ Jesus (Rev 2: 11).²⁴ The Adamic nature revealed the urge to do evil entered into human desire and God's opposition to the murder of fellow humans such as when Cain when killed Abel his brother.

Love and Human Dignity

W. Pannenberg's idea shows God expects us to live with love for each other as necessary for our social life giving us the understanding of our inherent God-given dignity in life. The love for others includes respect for their life, family, and property which will be sustained through God's Agape in the Ten Commandments. W. Pannenberg believes Jesus also referred to love as "the Golden Rule" that gives us a moral responsibility toward the rights of others.²⁵ It is through love that we overcome selfishness and disrespect for the human dignity of others. This would help us to understand God as the ultimate judge of all creation whose pattern of justice should be emulated for human relations on earth. God's expectation of love creates a sense of equality for humans required for the common good of survival. W. Pannenberg considers love as God's underlying reason for the redemption of humankind through His only begotten Son Jesus from the misery of sin in our Adamic nature.

If according to Jesus' message, God's work as the Creator and Sustainer who causes the sun to shine on the good and bad is a model for the commandment for the basis of love (Math 5: 14) <...> The love with which God loved the world in sending his Son (John 3: 16) does not differ in kind from the fatherly love of the Creator for his creatures. The sending of the Son proclaims the radical resoluteness of God's love as Creator for his creations.²⁶

The idea of love is based on God's gift of life for our redemption which is the hope for the fulfilment of destiny as God's creation. The project of human dignity is based on the love of God which Christ portrayed by showing concern for every aspect of

²² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 266.

²³ Ibid., 236. See also: Gerhard Freund, *Sünde im Erbe* (Stuttgart, 1979), 187.

²⁴ Ibid., 266.

²⁵ Ibid., 177.

²⁶ Ibid., 144.

our human life while on earth including our social relationships. Love is the ultimate commandment that promotes equality in both the Old and New Testaments (Leviticus 19: 17, Mathew 22: 39, Love your neighbour as yourself). We must approach the love of God with all our entirety so that we can appease God with our lives and show respect for other humans in the community (I John 4: 20, 3: 14). Christian emphasis on love have shown to have the inward will to influence our actions to prevent disregard for the rights of others. For instance, the ethics of love helps us to be tolerant towards others with God's love guiding our hearts. This has the moral ability to help us defeat hate, greed, and injustice that without a religious direction of Christ our humanity would be void of compromised moral judgment. This has influenced the moral obligation to respect dignity such as the formulation of human rights laws in western societies. For instance, W. Pannenberg traces the 1949 West German Constitution to support human dignity due to the influence of Christianity on the draft as a basic right.²⁷ This can also be associated with the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1776 Declaration of Independence, etc., whose authors showed support for equality and universalism of humankind as ascribed to us by God.

Conclusion

Dwelling on W. Pannenberg's idea has shown that humans are the climax of creation as described in the Bible but we struggle to achieve this dominion due to our struggle with sin which negates our divine destiny. God is interested in the expression of our dignity as a His esteemed creation because our dominion involves showing respect for the rights of humans. Divine fellowship with God will enable us to attain His divine likeness so as to be conformed to Him in the fullness of His divine image in Christ. Humanity without fellowship with God will be alienated from His righteousness and exposed to the misery of sin and death. W. Pannenberg emphasizes two important biblical sources in relation to God's image which is the creation of humankind in Genesis as created in the image and likeness of God and also Pauline's letters considered Jesus Christ the full image of God. We cannot manifest dominion in Adamic nature because of our finiteness which leads to sin with the consequence of death which is misery to our humanity. Divine fellowship with God helps us to portray His divine likeness helping us overcome sin with the fulfilment of our destiny so as to attain God's full image in future as we partake of Christ's resurrection. W. Pannenberg shows our divine likeness, the destiny of fellowship, love and human dignity is associated with God's dominion mandate for us to live on earth as vicars in order to escape the misery of our human imperfection. Our understanding of love for others and our moral obligation to the social life of others will help us create recognition of our God-given

²⁷ Ibid., 177.

rights as persons with equal rights and dignity. This is because we can only rectify the human social order which is marred with injustice and hatred through the love for one another as rooted in God's agape love.

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Gauta: 2022 07 01

Parengta: 2023 01 20

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ŽVILGSNIS Į ŽMONIJOS KANČIĄ IR ORUMĄ PAGAL W. PANNENBERGĄ

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje rašoma apie vokiečių teologą W. Pannenbergą, kuris daug dėmesio skiria žmogaus prigimtyje glūdinčiam pašaukimui į bendrystę ir atskleidžia, kaip meilė vienas kitam leidžia atpažinti asmens orumą. Šis autorius savo įžvalgas grindžia bibliiniu pasakojimu apie žmogaus sukūrimą pagal Dievo paveikslą ir panašumą su įgaliojimu valdyti kūrinių (Pr 1, 26–28), taip pat apaštalo Pauliaus skelbiamu žmonijos atpirkimu per Kristų. Kūrėjo suteiktas panašumas į Dievą lemia prigimtinį žmogaus polinkį į bendrystę, saugančią mus nuo nuodėmės sukeltos kančios ir įgalinančią žmogų būti Kristaus atvaizdu. Bendrystė

su Dievu įgalina mus, kaip Jo įgaliotus žemiškus vadovus, valdyti kūrinių. Visa tai padeda suprasti, kaip meilė vienas kitam leidžia mums priimti Dievo suteiktą žmogiškąjį orumą.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: W. Pannenbergas, kančia ir orumas, žmogiškumas, kristologija, žmogus kaip Dievo paveikslas ir panašumas.

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