
Wolfhart Pannenberg, Openness to the World, and the *Sensus Divinitatis*

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journals.sagepub.com/home/itq**Andrew Hollingsworth**

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Abstract

One of the foundational concepts for Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological anthropology is his notion of 'openness to the world.' Openness to the world, according to Pannenberg, is essential to human identity in that one's identity is established in their openness to the world, to the other, and, ultimately, to God. I aim to bring Pannenberg's openness to the world into dialogue with the concept of the *sensus divinitatis* as articulated by John Calvin and further developed by Alvin Plantinga. The question driving this paper is whether or not Pannenberg's openness to the world can rightly be understood as the *sensus divinitatis*, and, if so, what might be some benefits of it. I conclude that Pannenberg's understanding of openness to the world is a fruitful way of understanding the *sensus divinitatis* and a fruitful way of arguing for and explaining humanity's innate knowledge of God.

Keywords

sensus divinitatis, openness to the world, natural knowledge of God, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Alvin Plantinga, John Calvin

Introduction

A topic that has come up somewhat frequently in the history of Christian theology is that of the innate knowledge of God. Indeed, this topic has been approached from many different angles, and it is usually tied to a particular understanding of who God is. Anselm approached it from the standpoint of perfect being theology, through which he understood God as 'something-than-which-none-greater-can-be-thought.'¹ René Descartes

1 St. Anselm, *Proslogion, Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, edited by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford University, 1999), 87.

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grounded the innate knowledge of God in the concept of infinity, which he used in conjunction with his understanding of God as a supremely perfect being.² More specifically, he argued that the concept of the Infinite was an innate concept that was inseparable from the idea of God. More recently, Alvin Plantinga has drawn from the insights of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin on the *sensus divinitatis* to develop his reformed epistemological understanding of the innate knowledge of God, which is connected to his understanding of God as a maximally great being and his version of the ontological argument.

As one can see, multiple theologians have discussed and affirmed the notion of the innate knowledge of God, and, indeed, their contributions have been discussed at length. Wolfhart Pannenberg likewise discusses the innate knowledge of God, though he concludes ultimately that it is a false claim. There is, however, another topic, which he discusses in his theological anthropology, that seems to go hand-in-hand with his view of the innate knowledge of God, though he never directly connects the two: ‘openness to the world.’ Pannenberg’s concept of openness to the world seems to parallel what other theologians and philosophers of religion refer to as the *sensus divinitatis* (*SD*), or sense of the divine, though he never connects the two concepts, nor does he ever use the term *sensus divinitatus*. The question driving this paper is whether or not Pannenberg’s openness to the world can rightly be understood as the *SD*, and, if so, what are the implications. In what follows, I will argue that Pannenberg’s anthropological notion of openness to the world, along with his understanding of God as ‘the all-determining reality,’ can be understood as the *SD*, and that it offers a fruitful way forward for understanding and explaining humanity’s innate knowledge of God.

Pannenberg and Openness to the World

Pannenberg develops his concept of openness to the world in detail in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*.³ He is concerned primarily in this work to provide a thoroughly systematic and theological treatment of anthropology. He chooses the philosophical anthropology of J. G. Herder as his starting point, making frequent recourse to the works of Arnold Gehlen, Max Scheler, and Helmuth Plessner.⁴ Fundamental to this philosophical anthropology is openness to the world.⁵ This concept expresses how human beings are not bound to their instincts and basic desires, but are capable of transcending them

2 René Descartes, *Meditations and other Metaphysical Writings*, translated by Desmond M. Clarke, (London: Penguin, 199), 51–57.

3 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (London: T&T Clark, 1985).

4 Johann Gottfried Herder, ‘Treatise on the Origin of Language,’ in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002); Arnold Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, trans. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (New York: Columbia University, 1988); Max Scheler, *The Constitution of the Human Being: From the Posthumous Works, Volumes 11 and 12*, trans. John Cutting (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2008); and Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017).

5 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 34.

and experiencing freedom.⁶ This notion is similar to Plessner's 'exocentricity,' which, while similar, is more narrow in its definition.⁷ The focus of both these claims is that human beings, unlike the lower animals and other lower life forms, not only find their centre within themselves but outside themselves as well.⁸ Human beings are capable of self-transcendence; they are capable of transcending the moment and reflecting on their life with an outside perspective. More specifically, humans are able to transcend themselves and understand themselves as distinct from the other. In this sense, their centre is found in their relationship to the other. In Pannenberg's words, 'Human beings are present to what is other as *other*.'⁹

He goes on to demonstrate the relationship between the concepts of openness to the world and the image of God in Herder's work.¹⁰ Central to Herder's concept of the divine image is the notion of human destiny, namely that the image of God is what human beings are destined to be.¹¹ As Pannenberg comments, 'In order to realize their human destiny, their humanity, human beings remain dependent on the most varied influences from outside and on the harmonious contribution of these to the advancement of their humanity. Their disposition to be like God is therefore fulfilled only by God himself, through the operation of his providence.'¹² As such, humans are 'open' to the future as it is only the ultimate future that is the fulfilment of their destiny. Pannenberg points out that this 'exocentric structure of human living has therefore an openness that is not restricted to the things of the world.'¹³ This has major implications for humanity's being open to the future as regards being open to their destiny. Since humanity's destiny is the divine image, their openness to the future takes on the form of an openness to God: 'the so-called openness of the human being to the world signifies ultimately an openness to what is beyond the world, so that the real meaning of this openness to the world might be better described as an openness to God which alone makes possible a gaze embracing the world as a whole.'¹⁴ Pannenberg questions whether or not this leap can be justified:

Even when they [human beings] move beyond all experience or idea of perceptible objects they continue to be exocentric, related to something other than themselves, but now to an Other beyond all the objects of their world, an Other that at the same time embraces this entire world and thus ensures the possible unification of the life of human beings in the world, despite the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the world's actions on them.¹⁵

6 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 35.

7 *Exocentricity* is contrasted with *egocentricity*. Whereas the latter is concerned with finding one's identity, or centre, in the self, or ego, the former is concerned with finding it outside of the self, namely in its relationship to the other. See Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 37.

8 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 37.

9 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 62.

10 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 43–79.

11 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill (Bergman, 1966), 229. See also Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 45–46.

12 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 53.

13 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 68.

14 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 69.

15 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 69.

In self-transcendence, humans are capable not only of distinguishing themselves from themselves but also from objects as other. Even in doing this, however, they are able to conceive of the totality of reality that allows them to distinguish objects from other objects, the other from the other.¹⁶ It is only in this openness to the world that individuals grasp the totality of reality, which is what allows them to differentiate the self from the other as well as the other from the other, and this all-determining reality is none other than God himself. However, Pannenberg never explicitly connects this idea with the innate knowledge, or awareness, of God.

This concept of the totality of reality is one of the fundamental aspects of Pannenberg's entire theological enterprise, and it is here where his concepts of identity and meaning come together.¹⁷ The identity of a thing, which is inseparable from its meaning, is determined not simply by something innate to itself; rather, it is determined by how it relates to the other, namely the totality of reality that determines and constitutes the particulars from which it itself derives.¹⁸ Wholes are more than the particulars that make them up. It is the whole that determines¹⁹ the identity and meaning of the particulars, even though wholes themselves are constituted of the network of particulars.²⁰ Not only is this the case concerning beings, objects, and their identities, but also meaning. The meaning of a word, for example, is determined by the whole in which it occurs; the meaning of a statement is determined within the context, i.e., whole, in which it occurs.²¹ This notion of the totality of reality, according to Pannenberg, supposes the unity of reality.²²

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- 16 While my argument in this paper focuses on the historical and temporal aspects of Pannenberg's anthropological concept of openness to the world, there is also present a spatial aspect included in it, though the adequate amount of space needed to discuss it is not available in the present article. For how Pannenberg connects human openness to the world, or exocentricity, to philosophical reflections on spatiality, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 84–90.
- 17 Ted Peters refers to this concept in Pannenberg as *holism*, and he makes use of it in his own theological work. See Ted Peters, *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress), 30–31.
- 18 Pannenberg writes elsewhere, 'Meaning is to be understood . . . as the relation of parts to whole within a structure of life or experience.' See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976), 156.
- 19 By using the language of 'determine,' I do not intend to enter into the debates concerning determinism in Pannenberg's doctrine of creation, nor am I suggesting a sort of determinism concerning the actions of agents in creation. Rather, all I intend to communicate with this language, which is Pannenberg's language, is that the whole is what makes a particular within said whole what it is. What determines, or decides, that *this* is not *that* is the whole in which both *this* and *that* occur. This is what I intend the use of 'determine' to be.
- 20 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 130–52. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Eschatology and the Experience of Meaning,' in *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1973), 192–210.
- 21 One will notice that this concept of *meaning* has affinities with certain theories of meaning in semiotics as well, such as Umberto Eco's concept of the model encyclopedia. See Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1984), 46–86.
- 22 This concept of the unity of reality underlies Pannenberg's theory of truth as well. Both the notions of the unity of reality and the future play important roles here. Truth, according to

This notion of the unity of reality is fundamental to all human understanding, which is the concern of hermeneutics.²³ According to Pannenberg, hermeneutics is concerned with ‘understanding meaning, and meaning is to be understood in this context as the relation of parts to whole within a structure of life or experience.’²⁴ Humanity assumes the whole, or totality, of reality in order to understand the meaning and identity of things within their world of experience. Not only this, but they also assume the unity of this reality in being able to know and define things, including themselves. This is what Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer referred to as *the hermeneutic circle*.²⁵ For both of these philosophers, the hermeneutic circle is necessary for all human understanding. An individual is only able to understand what is other as it relates to and is distinct from the self. As one better understands themselves then they better understand the other as that which is other, which in turn betters their understanding of themselves as self-distinct from the other, and so on *ad infinitum*. This hermeneutic component is essential to openness to the world, if it indeed is not the very foundation of it, as one’s identity is grounded in its relationship to all others within the totality of reality.²⁶

Human beings in their exocentricity become aware of their own particularity within the totality of reality, and they look to this totality of reality for the answer to the question of their identity and destiny. In other words, humans only come to understand who they are by understanding their relationship with the totality of all there is, which, for Pannenberg, takes on the form of universal history (*Geschichte*).²⁷ However, history is

Pannenberg, is eschatological in that it awaits the totality of reality to truly come into being. Final truth does not yet exist. Truth necessitates coherence at its most fundamental level, but not all truth exists yet as the totality of reality does not yet exist. For Pannenberg, truth as coherence is more fundamental than truth as correspondence because coherence presupposes the unity of reality. Since reality does not yet exist in its totality neither does truth. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, ‘What is Truth?’, in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George H. Kelm (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1971), 1–27; and Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1.48–61.

- 23 Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘Hermeneutics and Criticism,’ in *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 3. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,’ in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1976), 18.
- 24 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 156.
- 25 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 193–95; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 268–70.
- 26 This concept of an all-unifying totality of reality and its implications for a theory of identity and meaning likewise find support in Eco’s semiotic theory, namely in his concept of the *maximal encyclopedia*. See especially Umberto Eco, ‘From the Tree to the Labyrinth,’ in *From the Tree to the Labyrinth*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2014), 70–74.
- 27 For Pannenberg’s original treatment of the notion of history, *Geschichte*, and its implications for theology, see *Revelation as History* trans. David Granskou, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg (New York: Macmillan, 1968). See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, ‘Hermeneutic and Universal History,’ in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kelm (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1971), 96–136.

still open, so the final answer to the question of identity is still open, in a sense. History will no longer be open when it comes to a close in the future kingdom of God. It is only in his future kingdom that God will be all-in-all, as his deity is identical with his reign.²⁸ It is in light of this understanding of God that Pannenberg defines 'God' as 'the all-determining reality': 'As a conjecture—a uniquely compelling one—it follows from the definition of the word "God" as the reality which determines all things. If "God" is to be understood as the all-determining reality, everything must be shown to be determined by this reality and to be ultimately unintelligible without it.'²⁹ Again, God will be all-in-all in his eschatological kingdom, which occurs at the climax of history, which decidedly marks all of reality as a completed whole, or totality. This totality of reality is what determines and constitutes all of the particulars of history, including human identity. In other words, the totality, or end, of reality determines the rest of reality, both ontologically and hermeneutically.

Since humans find their identity in being open to the world and to the future, i.e., they find their identity as it relates to the totality of reality, which comes about at God's eschatological kingdom, then their openness to the world is ultimately an openness to God. God, as the all-determining reality, is what determines the reality and identity of all there is, e.g., human identity and destiny. Since this openness to the world is innate in humanity then so is humanity's openness to God. To be open to the totality of reality is also to be open to the all-determining reality, i.e., God. Whether individuals realize this or not, they are always open to God and rely on God to determine their own identity and being.

However, I need to address a particular elephant in Pannenberg's theological room. While Pannenberg affirms that openness to the world is ultimately openness to God, he explicitly rejects that any innate awareness of God's being can be understood as any sort of proof for God's existence. In the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, he argues that, at best, this innate awareness of the divine is only a 'nonthematic knowledge of God,' or 'primordial awareness of a religious a priori.'³⁰ He writes, 'What Paul calls the knowledge of God from creation though his works (Rom. 1:20) may be only a vague sense of infinitude.'³¹ Not only this, but this vague sense of infinitude is not innate but arises from the 'experience of the world.'³² At best, there is only an innate disposition to believe in God. Just because there is a disposition to believe in a god within each person does not necessitate that there is an object that corresponds to said disposition. Thus, he argues, knowledge of God can only come about with the experience of some other data, namely an examination of the world's historical monotheistic religions.³³ The innate disposition to believe in God is no more than that—a disposition. There is no actual innate knowledge or awareness of God, according to Pannenberg.

28 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Richard John Neuhaus (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1969), 53–56.

29 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 302.

30 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1.115.

31 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1.117.

32 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1.117.

33 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1.140–41.

I take the above discussion of Pannenberg's views on openness to the world and openness to God to be true. However, I also believe that he is incorrect in his claims that this innate openness, or disposition, cannot be understood as an innate knowledge of God. Moreover, I believe that what he has described as openness to the world corresponds with what other theologians, such as Calvin and Plantinga, have articulated as the *sensus divinitatis*. In the following section, I will provide a brief exposition of the *SD* as articulated by Calvin and Plantinga, focusing primarily on the latter.

The *Sensus Divinitatis*

So, might openness to the world rightly be understood as the *SD*? First, it will be helpful to revisit briefly the doctrine and its contents. I will look at the doctrine as it is articulated by Calvin and developed further by Plantinga before bringing it into dialogue with Pannenberg's work.

Calvin discusses the *SD* in chapter three of book one in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, wherein he discusses the knowledge of God.³⁴ Calvin argued that God has revealed himself universally in the creation as well as particularly in Jesus Christ and Scripture, though he gives primacy to the latter.³⁵ By the phrase 'knowledge of God,' Calvin means 'that by which we not only conceive that there is some God, but also apprehend what it is for our interest, and conducive to his glory, what, in, short, it is befitting to know concerning him. For, properly speaking, we cannot say that God is known where there is no religion or piety.'³⁶ Concerning God as revealed in creation, he argues that God not only has revealed himself in the order and beauty of creation, but that he has implanted the knowledge³⁷ of himself in the human mind:

That there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of deity, we hold to beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.³⁸

34 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), I.3.1. (References to Calvin take on the form of Calvin, *Institutes*, book. chapter.section.)

35 'I speak only of that simple and primitive knowledge, to which the mere course of nature would have conducted us, had Adam stood upright. For although no man will now, in the present ruin of the human race, perceive God to be either a father, or the author of salvation, or propitious in any respect, until Christ interpose to make our peace; still it is one thing to perceive that God our Maker supports us by his power, rules us by his providence, fosters us by his goodness, and visits us with all kinds of blessings, and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ.' Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1.

36 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.2.1. Here, Calvin means to communicate that 'knowledge of God' is not merely propositional knowledge but personal and experiential as well.

37 I intend the terms and concepts of 'implanted knowledge' to be interpreted synonymously with 'innate knowledge.'

38 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1.

God has implanted knowledge of himself within the human mind for the sake of holding his creation accountable for their due worship of him.³⁹ Even those who are not much more developed than the lower animals, according to Calvin, seem to have an innate religious awareness.⁴⁰ Those who argue that religion was invented by those with the ill intentions of keeping others subject to themselves are absurd in this position.⁴¹ Even those, according to Calvin, who ardently swear that there is no God are innately aware of his presence:

The most audacious despiser of God is most easily disturbed, trembling at the sound of a falling leaf. How so, unless in vindication of the divine majesty, which smites their consciences the more strongly the more they endeavor to flee from it. . . . Even the wicked themselves, therefore, are an example of the fact that some idea of God always exists in every human mind.⁴²

As one can see, for Calvin, there is an innate knowledge of God implanted in the mind of every human being, though this knowledge is not one that can lead to receiving salvific grace. Because of the noetic effects of sin, man must come to knowledge of God through God's particular revelation in Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture to participate in salvation.⁴³ Nonetheless, there is an innate sense of God's existence, i.e., the *SD*, implanted in the mind of every human being, according to Calvin.

Alvin Plantinga takes up Calvin's doctrine of the *SD* and brings it into dialogue with the tools of analytic philosophy to develop a model for how the belief that God exists has epistemic warrant and is properly basic.⁴⁴ He does this through the developments of his

39 It is worth noting that not all theologians have interpreted Calvin here as straightforward as I have. For example, the meaning of what Calvin says concerning the natural knowledge of God was one of the points at the heart of the disagreement between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. In response to Barth's rejection of all forms of the natural knowledge of God, Brunner argued for a similar understanding as that which I am articulating in this paper, that God has revealed himself universally in the creation, or nature, but particularly in Jesus Christ, and that this latter is the only means by which one can be saved. Brunner makes recourse to Calvin, as do I, to make his point, but Barth strongly rejected this interpretation, favouring a reading of Calvin in which he only references the *sensus divinitatis* to disparage it. See Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace' by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply 'No!' by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. and ed. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009). For a concise and recent discussion of the natural knowledge of God in Calvin, see Edward Adams, 'Calvin's View of Natural Knowledge of God,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3.3 (2001), 280–92. See also T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959); Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); and T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1949). My understanding of Calvin on the natural knowledge of God essentially is the same of that espoused here by Adams, as well as Plantinga, which I will articulate further below.

40 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1.

41 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.2.

42 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.2.

43 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.4.1–4.

44 Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 167–353.

Aquinas/Calvin model. Central to this model is Thomas's and Calvin's agreement on the innate knowledge of God, though he gives more attention to Calvin than to Thomas.⁴⁵ Plantinga defines the *SD* in Calvin as 'a kind of faculty or a cognitive mechanism . . . which in a wide variety of circumstances produces in us beliefs about God.'⁴⁶ The circumstances mentioned cause human beings to develop beliefs about God, though they are not always aware of them. Indeed, this typically happens beyond their choosing: 'Under these circumstances, we develop or form theistic beliefs—or, rather, these beliefs are formed in us; in the typical case we don't consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs.'⁴⁷

Not only does the *SD* cause us to develop beliefs about God, but these beliefs, according to both Calvin and Plantinga, are innate.⁴⁸ Plantinga argues that Calvin does not claim the beliefs are innate themselves but that the capacity to develop these beliefs is what is innate.⁴⁹ He writes, 'The *capacity* for such knowledge is indeed innate, like the capacity for arithmetical knowledge. Still, it doesn't follow that we know elementary arithmetic from our mother's womb; it takes a little maturity. My guess is Calvin thinks the same with respect to this knowledge of God; what one has from one's mother's womb is not this knowledge of God, but a capacity for it.'⁵⁰ Once certain circumstances trigger the *SD* then it begins developing beliefs about God. These circumstances can be the beauty of creation or the rationality and order of creation. 'His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraved in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.'⁵¹ The *SD* functions like an input-output device; 'it takes the circumstances mentioned above as input and issues as output theistic beliefs, beliefs about God.'⁵²

Plantinga not only affirms Calvin's doctrine of the *SD*, but he goes beyond Calvin in demonstrating the epistemic warrant that beliefs from the *SD* enjoy. Pannenberg, in spite of what Plantinga has argued so far, could still make the charge that just because there is a natural disposition to believe or develop beliefs in God does not mean that there is an object that actually corresponds to this belief. He would still further charge that this disposition is nothing more than a disposition and that it certainly could not be considered knowledge. Plantinga, foreseeing charges such as these, has prepared a response. If, he argues, it is true that God exists then the innate awareness of God would be validated: '. . . if Christian belief is indeed true, then the [Aquinas/Calvin] model in question or one very like it is also true.'⁵³ He says elsewhere, 'On the other hand, if theistic belief is *true*,

45 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 170–75.

46 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172.

47 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172–73.

48 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

49 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

50 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173.

51 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.V.1. See also Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 174.

52 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 174–75.

53 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 169.

then it seems likely that it *does* have warrant. If it is true, then there is, indeed, such a person as God.⁵⁴ Pannenberg, at face value, seems to be correct: just because someone does believe in God, or is disposed to believe in God, does not necessarily mean that there is a God or that they have knowledge of him. However, what *if* God does exist? *If* God exists, according to Plantinga, *then* this would cast the disposition to form beliefs about God in a different light. If God exists, then naturally formed beliefs, such as 'God exists,' would then be true. Since these beliefs are formed by a cognitive mechanism that, when functioning properly in the appropriate environment and aimed at truth, was implanted in the mind by God in creating human beings, then said beliefs would enjoy epistemic warrant, should be considered properly basic, and thus would transform true beliefs about God into knowledge of God. If God does exist, then Pannenberg's claims about the innate knowledge of God seem to be erroneous.

However, Pannenberg, as I have already stated, does seem to be correct in what he articulates as openness to the world and openness to God, generally speaking. It is simply an error on his part that he rejects this as the basis for an innate knowledge of God. If God does exist, then openness to the world does turn out to be openness to God. I will now argue that Pannenberg's notion of openness to the world can rightly be understood as the *SD*, or at least as another way of understanding and explaining it.

Openness to the World as the *Sensus Divinitatis*

What does openness to the world have to do with an innate knowledge of the divine, or an innate capacity for knowledge of the divine? As Calvin demonstrated, there seems to be some innate awareness of God that has been implanted within the human from the initiation of their existence; and, as Plantinga has shown, this innate awareness is better understood as an innate capacity for knowledge of God. But what has this to do with humans being open to the world?

According to Pannenberg, humans are innately open to the world, or exocentric. Unique to the rest of creation, humans have the ability of self-transcendence; they are capable of transcending themselves and looking upon themselves as another. However, humans are also innately aware of the unity of reality. As noted above, this notion of the unity of reality is fundamental to all human understanding, which is a hermeneutic concern. Both the notion of the whole determining the meaning of particulars as well as the hermeneutic circle are involved in openness to the world. Again, hermeneutics is concerned with 'understanding meaning, and meaning is to be understood in this context as the relation of parts to whole within a structure of life or experience.'⁵⁵ Humanity assumes this whole of reality to understand each and every particular they encounter. Indeed, the totality of reality is necessary in order for one to know or understand anything at all, including themselves, according to Pannenberg. An individual is only able to understand what is other as it relates to and is distinct from themselves. As the individual better understands themselves then they necessarily better understand the other as that

54 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 188.

55 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 156.

which is other, which in turn betters their understanding of themselves as self-distinct from the other, and this goes on *ad infinitum*. Since all human understanding falls under the category of hermeneutics, and since all human understanding supposes the totality of reality, which climaxes with God as the all-determining reality, then one can even see all hermeneutic endeavours as participating in openness to God.

As noted above, Pannenberg defines God as ‘the all-determining reality.’ He does so for the following reason: the whole determines the particulars. The identity of a thing is determined by the whole in which it finds itself. Humanity exists within reality, which Pannenberg defines as history (*Geschichte*). Indeed, all reality is history. History is the whole that determines its particulars, e.g., the meaning and significance of events, and the meaning and identity of objects and individuals. History, however, is not yet a complete whole and is still open. History will become a completed whole at its climax in God’s eschatological kingdom. Since God is the power that will bring history to a close, making it a complete whole that will then determine absolutely all of its particulars, he therefore is the all-determining reality. He is the reality, the totalizing and uniting principle, that determines/will determine all there is and ever was.

God is the all-determining power of the totality of reality since he is the one who brings about the totality of reality. In their openness to the world, humans assume the totality and unity of reality in determining who they are. The identity of humanity thus is determined by God as the all-determining reality, the power of the totality of reality. Since this is the case, then humanity’s innate openness to the world is ultimately an innate openness to God, though they may not realize it. Each individual, according to Pannenberg, is innately open to the world. Since the logical implication of one being open to the world is that they are likewise open to God, then this openness to the world can, and I think should, be understood as the *SD*.

According to Plantinga, the *SD* is an innate sort of cognitive mechanism that produces within us beliefs about God under certain circumstances and states of affairs. When these certain circumstances arise, they occasion the *SD* to develop beliefs about God, though they may not always be aware of these beliefs.⁵⁶ As Calvin pointed out, the innate awareness of God is present even in those who are the staunchest rejectors of his existence. This parallels Pannenberg’s insistence on humanity’s innate awareness of God as the all-determining reality, though they may not always be aware of it. Some may not ever explicitly become aware of the totality or unity of reality, and there are some who downright reject the notion.⁵⁷ However, coherence is always a necessary condition for a proposition to be true, though it is debatable whether it is sufficient for a theory of truth.⁵⁸

56 This seems to go hand-in-hand with Thomas’s understanding of the *SD*: ‘To know in a general and confused way that God exists is implanted in us by nature.’ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province (New York: Glencoe/Christian Classics, 1981), I, q.2, a.1, ad.1.

57 For example, see Mark Taylor’s rejection of the concept of a universal and unified history in *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1984), 52–73.

58 James K. Dew Jr and Paul M. Gould, *Philosophy: A Christian Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 18–19. See also Douglas Groothuis, ‘Truth Defined and Defended,’ in *Reclaiming the Centre: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

Coherence is a necessary condition for truth because it reflects the unity of reality. Truth cannot be in disunity with other truth; it is always coherent with other truth. Even those who would argue against the unity of reality still suppose it when they aim for coherence in their systems of belief. Indeed, the need for coherence seems to be universal. Coherence, however, would be an impossibility were reality not a unity.

The innate awareness of the unity of reality is ultimately the innate awareness of God, who is the all-determining reality that is the principle of this unity of reality. In the same sense that, for Calvin and Plantinga, one has the innate awareness, or the innate capacity for awareness of God, though they may not be aware of it, they likewise have the innate awareness, or innate capacity for awareness, of the unifying totality of reality, though they may not be aware of it. Also, in the same way that the *SD* produces beliefs about God in the individual, openness to the world produces beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality, namely, the necessity for its unity and totality in the individual. As I have demonstrated, these beliefs are ultimately beliefs about God, who is the all-determining reality, whether or not the individual is aware of it. In this way also, openness to the world functions as the *SD*.

So, Pannenberg's openness to the world has multiple parallels with the doctrine of the *SD*. Not only does it have these parallels, but openness to the world is a unique and fruitful way of understanding and explaining the *SD*. The question still arises, however, why this way of understanding and explaining the *SD* might be preferred over those of Calvin and Plantinga. What are the advantages of understanding the *SD* in this way?

First, openness to the world is first and foremost an explicitly anthropological concept and only implicitly a theological one. Not only is openness to the world fundamentally an anthropological concept, but it is fundamental to human identity; it is one of the essential components that makes humans human. Understanding openness to the world as the *SD* provides us with anthropological categories for understanding humanity's innate, or natural, knowledge of God, and it does so without borrowing from theological categories. This is important because it verifies the same phenomenon occurring in different fields of study, though it goes by a different name. Sure enough, as a theological concept, the *SD* is understood and articulated through theological categories, as well as philosophical categories via Plantinga. Being able to understand the innate capacity for natural knowledge of God in anthropological terms provides us with a fuller understanding of the doctrine, as well might it serve useful in apologetic endeavours.⁵⁹

Second, the anthropological principle of openness to the world allows us to understand the *SD* as fundamental to what it means to be human. It is in this sense that openness to the world, and ergo the *SD*, are connected with human destiny; namely, that human beings having the innate capacity to know God is aimed toward their destiny, which is the Image of God and fellowship with God.⁶⁰ If the destiny of humanity is

59 I say this because numerous apologists will find ways of understanding theological concepts, or demonstrating theological concepts, with the aid of categories and tools from the non-theological sciences.

60 Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 49–50; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2.218–19. John Kilner likewise supports this understanding of the *imago Dei* as the destiny of humanity. See John Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 233–330.

fellowship with God in his eschatological kingdom, then it only makes sense that they would be born with the innate capacity to know God, and that this, which is fundamental to their being human, would be articulatable through anthropological concepts. Pannenberg's openness to the world, with its emphasis on human destiny as fellowship with God, is a fruitful way of understanding the *SD* because it makes this destiny explicit though it is already implicit.

Finally, understanding openness to the world as the *SD* is a good practice in doctrinal development. As many theologians have highlighted, going back to John Henry Cardinal Newman, Christian doctrine is not static; it develops.⁶¹ In order to remain intelligible in new contexts as history develops and continues, doctrine must likewise develop, without losing the essentials of its content, so that it might remain communicable and understandable. Understanding the *SD* as humanity's innate openness to the world accomplishes this goal. It allows us to understand humanity's innate awareness of the divine in current categories and a current idiom, and it does so without forsaking any of the essential components of the doctrine. Are there some minor differences between the concepts that prevent them from being identical? Sure; however, this is almost always the case when translating a concept from one set of categories into a new one. Translation is never perfect, and the items that are translated are not identical.⁶² Nonetheless, translation is inevitable and necessary if Christians are going to continue having something important to say to the world around them. While not identical, translating the theological concepts of the *SD* into the categories and concepts of anthropology seems to be useful. This is not to reduce theology to anthropology, quite the opposite. Rather, translating this theological concept into the categories of an anthropological concept shows how anthropology is fundamentally theological as well. This should not be surprising since all truth and all reality are always united, per Pannenberg.

61 John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1994). For more treatments on doctrinal development, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1997); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and Rhyne R. Putman, *In Defense of Doctrine: Evangelicalism, Theology, and Scripture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015).

62 This is perhaps demonstrated even by bringing Pannenberg and Plantinga into such constructive discussion. Pannenberg and Plantinga approach the issues surrounding theological epistemology from radically different standpoints. The former emphasizes a broadly hermeneutic and historical approach whilst the latter a focused analytical approach. While these approaches are *very* different from one another, they are not mutually exclusive. Hermeneutic and continental philosophy are not necessarily opposed to analytic philosophy; the two approaches have much to offer one another, just as I have tried to demonstrate that Pannenberg and Plantinga (and Calvin) have much to offer one another. Translation can be, and often is, both hermeneutic and analytic.

Conclusion

I have sought to bring Pannenberg's concept of openness to the world into dialogue with the doctrine of the *SD*. More specifically, I have argued and attempted to demonstrate that openness to the world offers us a new and fruitful way of understanding the *SD* through anthropological categories. Translating this theological concept into anthropological categories is useful in that it demonstrates the explicit relationship between the innate awareness of God and the destiny of humanity, which is fellowship with God; it further demonstrates that humanity's innate capacity to know God is fundamental to human identity; and it is a good example and practice of doctrinal development.

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