

JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN ON WOLFHART PANNENBERG

In the 1960s, it was thought that the emerging theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg were both theologies of hope. The details of their systems always differed and their interests subsequently diverged. But while it is generally accepted that Moltmann's theology is a theology of hope, leading to political activity, Pannenberg's is a theology of history and his political approach was far more conservative. Moltmann recalls:

In 1961 Wolfhart Pannenberg and the group around him, with Rolf and Trutz Rendtorf, Ulrich Wilckens, and Deitrich Rössler, had published a new theological outline with the provocative title *Revelation as History*. Here, with an eschatological view of 'universal history' indebted to Hegel, and a theological interpretation of 'the language of facts' as 'God's indirect revelation', Pannenberg introduced the horizon of world history into the theological discussion. This was supposed to put an end to the existentialist narrowing-down to the historicity of human existence (Bultmann) and the kerygmatic confinement to the divine history 'vertically from above' (Barth). With the concept of God's promise as the power that drives forward history, I had not departed so far from Barth, and initially understood Pannenberg's outline as a finalistic metaphysics of history.

It was in this light that I criticized it in the *Theology of Hope*. Pannenberg, however, felt not so much wounded as taken over, and in 1967 he wrote, 'Moltmann's renewal of the eschatological theme converges very largely with my ideas. That admittedly comes out more implicitly in Moltmann's formulation of his own position than in his dispute with me.' This then also applied to his contribution to the Bloch Festschrift of 1965, *Der Gott der Hoffnung* (The God of Hope). Here I admittedly felt rather taken over by him and wrote, 'I agree largely with his remarks in this essay. If these are supposed to be the real meaning of his earlier thesis in *Revelation as History*, some of my critical comments in the *Theology of Hope* fall to the ground. But if the "God of Hope" is supposed to be a step forward compared with *Revelation as History*, that would suggest a degree of self-criticism.' Pannenberg was my colleague at the Wuppertal Seminary from 1959 to 1961 and our theological discussions occasionally escalated into sharp disputes. We were not unknown to each other, and we had exchanged theological ideas. Consequently, in periodicals and newspapers

we were later often made jointly responsible for the new eschatological orientation of Protestant theology. But whether in spite of that we were still worlds apart is a question that may be left to the judgment of keen-eyed doctoral students.

I was linked with Pannenberg over the years through our similar approach in the eschatology of history and a parallel development of Trinitarian thinking. We both, each in his own way, tried to do theology in light of Christ's resurrection. But although my idea of promise and his idea of anticipation show theoretical correspondences, the practical consequences we drew in politics could unfortunately be completely contrary to each other. In 1969, along with the 'left-wing' intellectuals Adorno, Bloch, Jens, and Augstein in Frankfurt, we both protested against the Emergency Decrees, because we believed that they were a restriction of the young German democracy. But when in 1981, in the peace movement, we protested against rearmament, wanting to change 'swords into ploughshares' so as to 'anticipate' Christ's kingdom of peace, Pannenberg was by no means prepared to allow this to count as an 'anticipation' of the Coming One. At that time Hans Walter Wolff opposed him in his Isaiah interpretation, giving sound exegetical reasons. But Pannenberg considered Ronald Reagan to be the greatest of American presidents because he forced the Soviet Union to rearm to an extent disastrous for its economy. Whereas he knew that I was on the side of the Latin American liberation theologians, he fought vigorously against them in Faith and Order and joined forces with conservative Republicans in the United States, such as Peter Berger, Richard Neuhaus, and Michael Mowak, with the aim of silencing liberation theology. Since then we have preferred to talk about problems of the immanent Trinity rather than about politics. Nevertheless, in a strange way our 'old ties' have remained at a deeper level.¹

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (London: SCM, 2009), pp. 105-107.