

The Role Of Pietism In The Theology Of Jürgen Moltmann

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Unlike Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has interpreted evangelical Pietism in a negative light, Jürgen Moltmann sees that tradition with a far more positive outlook. Furthermore, his thought is distinctly colored by his use of Pietist motifs, as well as by allusions to Pietist authors. This became evident in his recent lectures at Asbury Theological Seminary, as well as by the record of his published works. It will be our task in this essay to identify those Pietist elements, as well as to offer some suggestions concerning the manner in which they have influenced his work as a systematic theologian.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF PIETIST ELEMENTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

German Pietism refers to that movement of inward, social, and ecclesial renewal and transformation that impacted the Continental churches of the Protestant Reformation during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, as well as their daughter churches in North America. The movement includes a broad range of writers whose works, which remain largely untranslated, are only casually known among American church historians, including scholars in the Wesleyan tradition.

Using this definition of the movement, it can be seen that Moltmann's work, beginning with an important group of historical essays from the 1950s, indicates their seminal influence upon his thought. There seems to be

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a particular affinity for the non-Lutheran, or Reformed Pietists, as well as their antecedents in medieval mysticism and apocalypticism, and for representatives of radical Pietism. To be sure, these writers occasionally exert a negative as well as a positive influence, and in all instances he interacts critically with his sources from the standpoint of his own systematic construct. Those writers he cites, either explicitly or implicitly, include Joachim de Fiore (1131-1202), Jacob Boehme (1595-1624), Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669), Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722), Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683-1729), Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), Friedrich Oetinger (1702-1782), and Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), as well as the Rhineland mystics (Eckhart and Tauler) and the Herborn tradition of Reformed theology.¹ Others could be identified, but these appear to be the most influential. How then, has Moltmann used these writers, and with what results?

When Professor Moltmann was recently asked what was the role of Joachim de Fiore, the great medieval apocalypticist, upon his thought, his reply was astonishing. In a softened voice, he said tersely that he was probably the "last surviving" Joachite. Hence, it is important that we identify this seminal and apocryphal figure, whose symbolic-prophetic exegesis of Scripture spawned a host of late-medieval apocalyptic movements and social protests. His influence reappeared within the left wing of the Reformation, becoming influential upon Thomas Muntzer, the Zwickau prophets, and the Peasants' Rebellion in Germany of 1524-25. Later, in a transformed manner, his ideas surfaced among the representatives of the Federalist covenant school of Reformed Pietism, including the symbolic-prophetic and millenarian interpretation of history by Bengel and Lampe, among others. The significance of this tradition for Moltmann needs to be more carefully investigated.

Joachim believed that he had discovered a method of biblical exposition that provided a coherent plan for interpreting history, based on a symbolic and prophetic reading of the biblical text. Consequently, history became schematized into three "ages," correlating with the three Persons of the Trinity. This provided the basis for an economic or historical, rather than an ontological, understanding of the Godhead, as in the Ancient ecumenical creeds. In his day, Joachism predicted the imminence of the "Third Age," that of the Spirit, which would be characterized by the fullness of the Spirit as an indwelling witness within the lives of humankind. Authority would no longer be externally and coercively imposed from without, as in the former ages of Israel (the Age of the Father) and the Church (The Age of the Son). This facilitated the ascendancy of millennial thought in Western Christendom, both within Roman Catholicism and, later, Protestantism, that was often associated with social protests fueled by revolutionary fervor, as in the Peasants' Rebellion. Joachite thought later merged with the "federal" periodization of all history, biblical and secular, according to a series of covenants. This exegetical school had apostolic roots in Irenaeus (135-202) and the Cappadocian Fathers, and it received its fullest development in the biblical expositions of Bengel and Lampe.

Joachim's outlook provides a stark contrast with and a direct challenge to Augustine's view of history, that subdued the element of progress in the historical struggle between the two "Cities" and spiritualized, and thus relativized, the doctrine of the millennium by identifying it with the age of the Church in history since Pentecost. His outlook also directly challenged the authority of his near contemporary, Thomas Aquinas, and his apotheosis of the Church of Rome and its dogma as the *Summa Theologica*.

In sympathy with Joachim's outlook, Moltmann writes:

If we want to overcome the monotheistic interpretation of the lordship of God by the trinitarian understanding of the kingdom, then we must go back to Joachim of Fiore, and rediscover the truth of his trinitarian view of history. Joachim counted as an "Enthusiast" and outsider. But in fact, ever since the middle ages, there is hardly anyone who has influenced European movements for liberty in church, state and culture more profoundly than this twelfth-century Cistercian abbot from Calabria, who believed that in his visions he had penetrated the concordance of the Old and New Testaments, and the mystery of the book of Revelation.²

Moltmann takes issue with Aquinas's charge that Joachim "dissolved" the doctrine of the Trinity in world history. "It was rather a question of appropriating to the different persons of the Trinity the forms which the Kingdom took in the different eras of world history."³ With regard to Joachim's "third form" of the Kingdom, that of the Spirit, Moltmann offers the positive explanation that it is "the rebirth of men and women through the energies of the Spirit,"⁴ whereby God rules through direct revelation and knowledge, and people are turned from being God's children into His friends.⁵ Friendship with God—the highest stage of freedom—is uniquely the mark of the Kingdom of the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17). Groups and individuals who were known by the title "Friends of God" appeared often in later centuries, and wherever they cropped up they bore the influence of Joachim, particularly with the appearance of some assertion of a messianic claim.

In an earlier, seminal article on Reformed Pietism, Moltmann showed the link between the Joachite tradition and the federalist (covenantal) school that developed in Holland and the Rhineland of Germany in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.⁶ This school inherited the covenant motif from Calvin, via Olevian and Ames, and in the systematic theology of Johannes Coccejus, this motif displaced the prominence of Aristotelian philosophy as a controlling theme in Reformed dogmatics. It was among the disciples of Coccejus, especially C. Viringa, Bengel's teacher, and F. A. Lampe, that the Joachite symbolic-prophetic exegesis gained renewed prominence. Lampe correlated his step-wise soteriology, as found in his recently translated *Secret of the Covenant of Grace*,⁷ with his overall interpretation of *Heilsgeschichte*, that culminated in his anticipation of a coming millennial age of the Church on earth. Prior to Joachim, chiliasm had been restricted to medieval apocalypticism and the radical reformers.

Now it had become integrated into "mainline" (magisterial) church tradition, albeit in a distinctly pietistic way. Lampe brought together the Rhineland mystical tradition, that inculcated the interior life with God, with Dutch (Voetian) precisionism, and integrated these themes with his overall symbolic-prophetic exegetical method. Just as the goal of personal salvation was the completion of sanctification, to be achieved under the Spirit's personal leading, so also the overall goal of history was to be found in the millennial age of the Spirit, when God's Kingdom and the historical church will become coterminous.

Lampe looked for signs of this coming convergence by examining the prophetic word, the growth of religious awakenings (including those in his own Bremen Reformed parish), and the new discoveries in science. The latter can be properly interpreted as constituting "revelatory knowledge" when they are examined by the regenerate observer who is being guided by the "proper" canons of biblical prophecy. Moltmann cited Lampe in this regard as follows:

In such perceptions (that all prophecy is "anticipata historia") the blissful feeling and the sense of progress of the Baroque Age is expressed in Lampe's assertions concerning the periods of saving history (*Heilsgeschichte*) "Where will the depths of the wisdom of God be more fully revealed than when there is an investigation and comparison of the various ways that God has led His church? How artfully has the Lord produced all things in accordance with its time? Do not all things hang upon one another like the links of a chain? Does not one step follow another in an orderly fashion? Does not the most delightful arrangement glimmer amid a manifold diversity, where that which is passing away is always a shadow of that which is coming, and that which results is a new and perfected image of that which has passed?...Since every day new discoveries are being made in nature (through field glasses), what is it to wonder that, through a corresponding diligence in the thorough examination of the divine Word, new discoveries will occur here as well, and the promised growth in knowledge in the last times (Daniel 12:4; Ez. 47:4) will more and more commence, in order to be fulfilled!"⁸

While Lampe made use of the Joachite, symbolic-prophetic exegesis for his pastoral and systematic theological concerns, the great Württemberg Pietist, Johann-Albrecht Bengel, utilized this method in his monumental biblical commentaries, from which John Wesley would derive much data for his *Explanatory Notes on the Old and New Testaments*.⁹ Moltmann has noted Bengel's assertion that biblical prophecy is knowledge, to be added to law and gospel as expressions of divine revelation. In Bengel's view, a proper knowledge of biblical prophecy delivers one from acts of sin arising from either presumption or despair. Moltmann observes that both presumption and despair share the common problem of prematurity, since the former prematurely anticipates what is desired from God, and the latter prematurely anticipates God's non-fulfillment.¹⁰ However, Moltmann believes that Bengel has undermined the openness to the

future that is inherent in biblical prophecy by reducing it to anticipated history, that is "prognostic and predictive." He observes, "The novum of God's promise becomes factum. In place of the eschaton of the fulfillment, which must be searched for in hope on the basis of the promise that has been heard, merges a finale of history which is to come to light in the course of history."¹¹ In Bengel's defense, it may be argued that he counsels "faithfulness to a time and place about which one is conscientious but not compulsive."¹² Bengel does not actually counsel that the knowledge of the future is in itself salvific, although it may contribute to the sanctifying process in that it thwarts presumption and despair by giving heed to the proper time and place for the service of God and neighbor. To comprehend the present moment in the light of eternity is expressed by Bengel with the metaphor of existing "before the eyes of Jesus."¹³ This is an antidote to the sin of losing time for the labors of love by the indulgence of sloth (*acedia*).

Two other figures that reflect the influence of the federalist (covenantal) tradition have also been subjected to Moltmann's analysis. Gerhard Tersteegen, the great hymn writer and spiritual counselor who has recently been designated by a leading British historian, "the most fascinating character in the whole history of religious revival,"¹⁴ was largely viewed by Moltmann as a Quietist.¹⁵ Significant revisions of that thesis have recently appeared.¹⁶ Far more appreciatively has he viewed the work of J. C. Blumhardt, a Württemberg Neo-Pietist whose work in social reform helped lay the groundwork for the modern German Social Democratic Party, the party of Willi Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. Barth had also valued Blumhardt's comment that the Bible is to be read in one hand, with the daily newspaper in the other.¹⁷ The impetus for Blumhardt's program of social reform was the Pietist message of the New Birth, coupled with the optimistic outlook of the coming transformation of history and society under the economy of the *Heilsgeschichte*. While its historical and eschatological outlook had its roots in the federalism of Coccejus, Lampe, and others, he placed greater emphasis upon the human role as initiator of these end-time events than did his predecessors. With Blumhardt, theology was increasingly being eclipsed by anthropology, although he succeeds in circumventing the older charge that Pietism was overly acetic and more interested in issues of personal rather than social ethics.

Finally, Moltmann has been drawn toward aspects of the thought and work of the eccentric Pietist nobleman, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, whose leadership of the *Unitas Fratrum* (or Moravians) propelled that persecuted body upon the world stage of the eighteenth century as pioneer proponents of world missionary outreach. However, it was neither Zinzendorf's organizational nor his strategic skill that interested Moltmann; instead, it was his interest in Zinzendorf's distinctive conceptualization of the Holy Spirit as the female principle within the Triune Godhead. In like manner, Moltmann has asserted that the Spirit, as Mother, "births us into God."¹⁸ Zinzendorf's concern was to articulate a familial concept of the Holy Trinity, a position not held by other Pietists. Moltmann's concern was to accentuate the aspect of the Spirit's role in the New

Birth that points toward prophetic fulfillment of the text, "I am making everything new" (Rev. 21:5). In his exposition of this passage, Moltmann does not opt for teleology, or a factual report of that which will be, but for eschatology, or that which becomes, in the sense of divinely coming upon us. It is living in anticipation of God's new world in the midst of the old. Here again, his deeper affinity is for Joachim.

CONCLUSION

Our examination of Pietist sources in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann indicates an extensive interest in this tradition as a conveyor and, in some aspects, as an originator of theological motifs that have had seminal influence upon the shaping of his thought. This influence has been traced both in his historical and in his systematic work. Moltmann has avoided the overall negative assessment of Pietism that has been evident in Pannenberg as well as in Barth.¹⁹ From our vantage point, it also predisposes him toward a favorable evaluation of the modern evangelical awakenings of Christianity, of which the Wesleyan movement stands as a constituent part.

Notes

1. In a statement to the author, Professor Moltmann indicated that no adequate theological treatment of this important school exists. The school at Heborn (est. 1584) was a center for antischolastic, life-centered Ramist theology in the age of Protestant Orthodoxy. As such, it was the nursery for a Bible-based covenant (federal) theology in the age of Protestant Orthodoxy, through the influence of its first systematic theologian Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), a co-author of the ironic *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). Not surprisingly, it also became a center for German Reformed Pietism at a later date, and the products of its missionary impulse included John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the seventeenth-century leader of the Czech Brethren (Unitas Fratrum), and Philip William Otterbein (1726-1813), who brought the Pietism of Herborn to North America and became a close personal friend of the Methodist bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816). It is noteworthy that Professor Moltmann was scheduled to receive the Comenius Award at the Moravian Center in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, after delivering his lectures at Asbury Seminary [see also J. S. O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith: the Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1973)].
2. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 203.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Jürgen Moltmann, "Jacob Bröcard als Vorläufer der Reich-Gottes-Theologie und der symbolisch-prophetischen Schriftauslegung des Johann Coccejus," in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 110-129.
7. J. Steven O'Malley, *Wayfaring and Warfaring* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1993).

8. Moltmann, "Jacob Bröcard als Vorläufer" (translated by the author). It is to be noted that a compendium of Lampe and Vitringa (Bengel's teacher) was the major theological text read by the Otterbeins at the Reformed Academy at Herborn (Germany), prior to William Otterbein's missionary service in North America. Highlights of that service included his leadership in forming the United Brethren in Christ, perhaps the earliest denomination formed in America, and his fraternal relations with Francis Asbury. Hence, there is some linkage between Lampe and the Wesleyan tradition.
9. See Albert Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford, 1964), pp. 223-331.
10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope*, trans. J. W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 23-25; and C. John Weborg, "The Eschatological Ethic of Johann Albrecht Bengel," *The Covenant Quarterly* (May, 1978):33.
11. Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, trans. Margaret Clarkson (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 187.
12. Weborg, "The Eschatological Ethic," p. 33.
13. J. A. Bengel, *Sechzig erbauliche Reden Über die Offenbarung Johannis oder vielmehr Jesu Christi, Neue Auflage* (Stuttgart: Johann Christoph Erhard, 1771), pp. 60, 104; *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannes oder vielmehr Jesu Christ, Dritte Auflage* (Stuttgart: Johann Christoph Erhard, 1758), p. 262.
14. W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1992), p. 230.
15. Jürgen Moltmann, "Grundzüge mystischer Theologie bei Gerhard Tersteegen," *Evangelische Theologie*, 16 (1956):208-209.
16. See the review of recent literature on Tersteegen in Hansgunter Lüdwig, *Gebet und Gotteserfahrung bei Gerhard Tersteegen....* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1986), pp. 19-58.
17. See the recent discussion of Blumhardt's Christian social work in Frank Macchia's *Spirituality and Social Liberation: The Message of the Blumhardts in the Light of Württemberg Pietism*, to be published in 1993 by Scarecrow Press in the *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies Series*, eds. David Bundy and J. Steven O'Malley.
18. Jürgen Moltmann, "All Things New: Invited to God's Future," Ryan Lecture delivered at Asbury Theological Seminary on November 6, 1992.
19. Barth has indicted Pietism, which he placed under the umbrella-term "pietistic-rationalistic Modernism," as one of the two major "heresies" of the contemporary church, along with Roman Catholicism. Both are charged with undermining the theocentric nature of the faith by an undue preoccupation with anthropocentric concerns. Despite this critique, Barth did not hesitate to write appreciatively of particular Pietists, including Coccejus, Zinzendorf, and Christoph Blumhardt. See Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God" (1956 lecture), trans. and ed. James Strathearn McNab in *God, Grace, and Gospel* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), and reprinted in Clifford Green, ed., *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom* (London: Collins, 1989), pp. 46-66; also Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 2:1, 172-178.



