

Review

Time in Eternity: Pannenberg, Physics, and Eschatology in Creative Mutual Interaction. By Robert John Russell. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2012. 440 pages. Softcover \$49.00.

Robert John Russell, in his latest book, takes on an ambitious project that aims to engage theologians who are supporters or detractors of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Even more, he wishes to extend Pannenberg's arguments by providing an analysis of the physics involved with questions of time and space. Since that discussion is even more unsettled than arguments about Pannenberg's theology, this book by Russell represents a delicate balance of providing various alternative views on key points while still pushing forward with a constructive effort that asserts and defends a particular interpretation. Russell is especially interested in developing Pannenberg's notion that the resurrection is a proleptic event that actually merges the future with the present, an argument that Pannenberg first made more than three decades ago but has since continued to develop. This notion of prolepsis, somewhat controversial in itself, demands an understanding of time that provides a forward orientation that nevertheless can be contained in some way in our experience of the present. All notions of time are challenging given contemporary models in physics, but Russell sets out to provide the necessary argument to give support to Pannenberg's complex understanding of the resurrection and the eschatological purposes of God.

It is not truly fair to focus so much on the final pages of this book given the complexity of the arguments presented, but short book reviews are clearly unfair to such important work. I take the project to be finally a theological effort that aims to find support from the sciences in giving understandable explanations. Thus, Russell's turn to Luther's theology of the cross at the end of his argument is an important summation of the whole developed analysis. In addition, this move allows for the constructive moment in what otherwise is a meticulous analysis of Pannenberg's theology. He actually is using Ted Peters's version of Luther's thinking. The theology of the cross is the place where "we find revealed who God truly is and how God truly saves" (351). The problem is that the power of the cross (that is the despair of the moment) overwhelms what might also be an experience of the positive power of God in nature. But this event with its hiddenness (the saving, creating God) reveals for Russell also the true nature of time. The eschatological future is actually hidden in the normal experience of the present leading into the future as a prolepsis. Thus, there are two layers of time in our experience, one being hidden.

Russell's creative moment then moves forward by integrating into this analysis the work of John Hick and the notion of a soul-making world. This can be seen as a saving moment for us because the power of God moving history forward is hidden so that we humans can effectively make moral choices by doing what is right not because we see a reward. Eschatology is ethics in this way, but this hidden dimension of time both allows legitimate moral choice and empowers such

choices because the future is already present in our sense of time. For Russell this means that the presence of God cannot overwhelm us, but must be sufficient to provide grounding for our moral choices. Indeed, we need enough of a glimpse to be able to make the theistic choice and enough experience of the eschatological to avoid the atheistic choice. This project, the moral project, is sufficient reason for Russell to engage in a rich science and theology dialogue, in the field of science and religion.

As usual, Russell's thinking demands careful attention to detail, requiring the student who has enough background to understand and follow the complex arguments. There is however a fully satisfying result achieved by carefully following Russell along this ambitious and challenging path. His argument assumes much of the validity of Pannenberg's theology, with the faith that understanding the theology and providing the corresponding science will open creative doors for exploration. He ends the book with a continuing research project, studying "the complex temporal structure of nature" (354). If this is truly a constructive theological project, then it is rewarding journey for any who are ready for the task.

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