

**BASIC QUESTIONS IN THEOLOGY, Volume 2**, by Wolfhart Pannenberg, tr. by George H. Kehm, S.C.M. Press, London, 1971. 249 pp. £3.

Pannenberg is the most important and interesting theologian around at the moment (though some who have heard him lecture in this country recently may find this hard to believe). He has been a dominant figure in Federal Germany for more than a decade and his work has been widely discussed on the continent for some time now, and also in the United States where, predictably, there is already a group of self-styled 'Pannenbergians' of whom some, at least, misunderstand what Pannenberg is trying to do. It has taken longer for Pannenberg to become known in Britain but the publication of this volume marks the point where he can be said to have 'made it', though how many people in this country have taken or are taking the trouble to read Pannenberg at length remains doubtful. During the last two years translations have appeared of the work he and his friends, the 'Pannenberg Circle', produced on revelation in 1960, his large work on christology which was published in Germany in 1964, and now his collected essays published in Göttingen in 1967 as *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*. This volume of essays, in fact, is not a separate entity in its own right, but just happens to be the second half of his collected essays which were published in one volume in Germany. This is worth noting because Pannenberg's preface to the collection is to be found at the beginning of Volume 1 together with the translator's explanation of why he chose to translate certain German words as he did: for example, it is useful to know that 'historicalness' represents that hardy perennial '*Geschichtlichkeit*'. What is more important is that the arrangement of these articles is not arbitrary, nor is it chronological; the order has been arranged by Pannenberg himself so that the reader might be led systematically through the broad range of the author's thought. The articles which deal with the core of his theology—the hermeneutical problem, his concept of 'universal-history' as the way through this problem, the place Jesus's resurrection has as a real event and as a proleptic appearance of the final general resurrection—were all published in Volume 1, and unless these have been welded into a schematic whole in the mind of the reader there is a fair chance that he will misunderstand much of the content of these articles in Volume 2.

The blurb on the dust-cover says that this book contains Pannenberg's articles on God and faith, which would be true if the publisher had included here the last article of the first volume which dealt with the problem of analogy. The first article, 'What is Truth?', is perhaps the least rewarding and most difficult to read, with the possible exception of the last, 'The God of Hope', written for a *Festschrift* 'In Honour of Ernst Bloch' which largely repeats the content of the two preceding articles on God. This last article is not an attempt to jump on any post-Moltmann band-waggon because it was written in 1965 and is a product of the climate at Tübingen which was and still is influenced by Ernst Bloch. The article merely expands upon the theme to which the author returns in most of these essays, that God has raised Jesus from the dead as an historical event which heralds the future appearance and reign of the hidden God. In three articles Pannenberg tries to disentangle the God of philosophy from the God of Israel who has acted in history. This is not to say that he thinks that a philosophical quest for God is in any sense inappropriate or illegitimate, but he refuses to allow the God who raised Jesus from the dead to be restricted by any philosophical conception. In the first of these articles he examines the manner in which the early Church up to the Cappadocians appropriated Middle-Platonic ideas about God, and, whilst recognizing certain inadequacies, he argues against Harnack that the Fathers of the early Church were more faithful to the Bible than they themselves probably realized. Again he tries to disentangle the God of the Bible from the finite egotistical projection which was destroyed by Feuerbach, and he wants to reaffirm the God who has become known in history against Gollwitzer, a Barthian to the core, who has nothing better than the God who speaks to us in the Word and who demands obedience (this, of course, is an expansion of Bonhoeffer's accusation against Barth that his idea of revelation was positivistic). The other important article in this book is a plea for the History of Religion to look at its subject as an historically conditioned handing on of traditions which attempt to mediate truth, rather than a supposedly objective phenomenological

analysis of religion. This latter suggestion may not seem to take theology very far, but, although Pannenberg's ideas fall into a unified theological scheme, it is typical of these essays that, while generally succeeding in making some significant advance, he always introduces us to a wider unexplored area, and in this he admirably illustrates the theological project.

The translator has done a difficult job pretty well, though the reader will find occasional American expressions and frequent American

spellings. There are the customary misprints, the oddest of which is on page 223, where 'This why is . . .' should read 'This is why. . .'. It has already been mentioned that this book is just half the original German edition, and those who read the review of Volume 1 by Professor Macquarrie will have noticed that that cost £2.10. This volume costs £3, which is inflation at the rate of 43 per cent over twelve months.

GEOFFREY TURNER

**RESURRECTION: A SYMBOL OF HOPE**, by Lloyd Geering. *Hodder and Stoughton*. 256 pp. £2.25.

One doesn't have to be an arch conservative to find so much 'liberal theology' boring and inconsequential. There is a formula through the use of which books of liberal theology can write themselves: choose a theme, caricature the tradition of it, pillory that caricature, and finish the book with a flourish of rhetoric and Existentialist-sounding slogans. This is roughly the scheme followed in this book in which Professor Lloyd Geering wants to show that the traditional understanding of Resurrection has died and to offer an alternative understanding. 'Bodily resurrection' is the great bogey, but can Geering really expect to be taken seriously when he spends a good deal of his book attacking the concept of 'bodily resurrection' without making any effort whatsoever to examine or discuss philosophically what is meant by 'bodilyness'?

Geering begins by showing the bankruptcy of the traditional understanding of Jesus' resurrection and it is worthwhile quoting at some length his summary of what he thinks that understanding to be:

The resurrection of Jesus began when life miraculously returned to the dead body of Jesus so that he once again became a conscious living being, the same Jesus who had died on the cross. He rose from the position where he had been laid, disentangling himself sufficiently from the linen cloths in which his body had been swathed to enable him to walk. Then he walked out of the tomb, from the mouth of which the customary round stone had been rolled aside by unseen forces. During the period of the next forty days the risen Jesus was seen and recognized in this form by his disciples.

This traditional view, he says (pp. 18, 19), was held with conviction from the end of the first century right down to the modern period. His support for this extraordinary statement is from two Anglican documents of the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries and what he calls 'documents like this'—totally unspecified. The tradition has often been ambiguous, sometimes even somewhat awry, but Geering's caricature is facile, tendentious and silly. In fact 'silly' can describe many things about this book. It is silly to maintain that by 'mythological' we mean 'that unseen world, intangible to man, from which angels and evil spirits are thought to exert their mysterious influences upon man. . . . Its weakness is that depending so much on the human imagination, it can quickly move out of touch with the objective real world.' (p. 24). It is silly to state that 'when man reaches the limits of his empirical knowledge about himself and his world, he confesses his faith, or his response of life, in the form of myth and poetry' (p. 197)—as though myth and poetry were purely provisional kinds of knowledge simply waiting for empirical knowledge to catch up. It is also silly to say that historical events take place 'in an observable world of space and time, where they may be witnessed by all who happen to be in the vicinity. There is always something public and open about an historical event in that anyone could have seen it, if only he had been there' (p. 24). Which historical events is he thinking of? Vietnam? Ulster? Jesus himself? (cf. John 7, 12). Unfortunately for historical empiricists like Professor Geering, there are no 'facts' about historical events, only *truth* which some people can see and some can't no matter how close they are to the situation.

In part II Geering sketches the origins and development of the idiom of resurrection: as a task not at all a silly thing to do. But he places himself in a very odd position. Having said on page 17 that concepts are usually older than the words which are created to signify them (sloppily put, but one can see what is meant), he then goes on to say: 'But we cannot adequately trace the development