

Moltmann wins theology world cup: Hans Urs von Balthasar is first runner-up

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German Protestant Jürgen Moltmann was declared the greatest theologian of the 20th century in the finals of the Systematic Theology World Cup, conducted on the Internet while the world's top soccer tournament was being played in Germany.

“Moltmann’s relevance for his age, as well as his impact on church and academia, was considered to be more significant,” noted Finnish theologian Patrik Hagman, who staged the four-week contest (as noted in [CenturyMarks](#), July 25).

Thirty-two theologians were entered in qualifying groups when the unusual theology tournament opened June 9. Of the 16 theologians in the heats, there were six Germans, four Americans, two from France and four of other nationalities. Nine were Protestant, six were Catholic and one was Orthodox.

The final pitted Moltmann against Swiss Roman Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar. The contest was decided by visitors to the Internet site, who were asked to rate the two finalists on five criteria linked to creativity, relevance, permanence and impact on the church and on the academic world.

Moltmann won four of the five polled categories as well as the overall vote, but von Balthasar’s works were considered by the majority to have a more timeless quality, Hagman noted.

Born in Hamburg in 1926, Moltmann is considered one of the most important Reformed theologians of the latter half of the 20th century and is known for stressing Christian hope and the solidarity of the “crucified God” with humanity. Moltmann beat Catholic Karl Rahner in the semifinals.

Von Balthasar, who died in 1988, beat Protestant Wolfhart Pannenberg in the quarter-finals and faced U.S. Lutheran Robert W. Jenson in the semifinals. Von

Balthasar scored higher “very clearly regarding influence and creativity, but Jenson managed to take home the consistency award,” a referee noted.

Born in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 1905, von Balthasar was reputed to be Pope John Paul II’s favorite theologian. He was trained as a Jesuit but left the order to found a secular institute dedicated to the cultural transformation of society. -*Stephen Brown, Ecumenical News International*