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EBERHARD JÜNGEL: GOD IS LOVE

DAVID F. FORD

Eberhard Jüngel has produced a remarkable range of theology, in new Testament studies, philosophy, Luther and Barth studies, sermons and, above all, in constructive systematics or dogmatics. He is also an outstanding lecturer – I remember being surprised in Tübingen that more students went to his lectures than to Moltmann's, Küng's and Kasper's combined. The English-speaking world has been slowly engaging with him, with the help of more translations, a good introduction to his theology by John Webster, and the recognition that many theologians are finding his thought fruitful.

This essay is an exploration of his work along two lines: through his *magnum opus* so far, *God as the Mystery of the World. On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1983) [hereinafter referred to as *God*]; and through John Webster's *Eberhard Jüngel. An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge University Press 1986) [*Introduction*].

Thinking

"We no longer dare to think God," says Jüngel in his Foreword to the first and second editions of *God*. He insists on the great need for this thought, on its necessary complexity and slowness and on the inadequacy of most contemporary theology. His own thinking in this book shows most affinities with Barth seasoned by Bultmann and Heidegger, and, perhaps even more fundamentally, the christology of Luther and the philosophy of Hegel. Through all this runs his interpretation of the New Testament, the pivotal texts being 1 John's "God is love" and Paul's "word of the cross". His style of thinking is fascinatingly rich yet vigorous. He tends to crystallize key concepts by thinking through metaphors, narratives, basic experiences (love, trust, anxiety, joy) and other theologies and philosophies, and his conceptual creativity is one of his main contributions to theology. In what follows I will be examining the series of gems that he produces in his thought of God. This catena of memorable, concentrated phrases is probably the best way into his theology, and it has the stimulating quality of helping to provoke and nourish fresh thought even when one might question Jüngel's own method and conclusions

If I were looking for a contemporary theologian with whom to contrast Jüngel the most illuminating choice would be Pannenberg. Jüngel himself clearly respects Pannenberg, yet right at the start of *God* he distinguishes sharply their two ways of doing theology. This is very important for understanding his position. He sees Pannenberg attempting to think God without presupposing a relationship with God, as if it were possible to think one's way into faith from outside. Pannenberg laments the rejection of natural theology by many Protestant theologians and insists on the rational content of the thought of God. Jüngel also sees the thought of God as rational, but his God cannot be rationally inferred from the world. Rather, God freely and without necessity addresses human beings and is to

be known in this relationship. Jüngel's question to Pannenberg is: "Does [your] procedure, which makes the necessity of God plausible by first analysing human existence without God, take seriously enough of the fact that God, like man, should be thought of *from the context of freedom*?". (*God* p.17.)

In his Foreword to the third edition Jüngel reviews responses to his book and concludes that "all the questions directed to my theological position can be summarized in the recommendation to return to the anthropological grounding of the thought of God, . . . 'to demonstrate on the path of reason the boundaries of reason and the necessity of the self-surpassing of reason' (Kasper)" (p.xiii). In other words, Pannenberg's method is the main alternative. But for Jüngel something has already happened which fundamentally affects the way God can be thought. Once that event, witnessed to in the New Testament, has been recognized, its content cannot but inform all theology. So Jüngel's thinking "goes from the inside towards the outside, from the specifically Christian faith experience to a concept of God which claims universal validity" (p.viii).

This conflict is fundamental to much 20th century theology, with Barth as the main champion on Jüngel's side. Many of Webster's criticisms of Jüngel seem to stem from deep disquiet about Jüngel's consistent pursuit of his approach. Indeed Jüngel's singlemindedness and rigour in doing this provide yet another way in which his theology is immensely stimulating even for those who might not share all his positions. I will take up this issue again later, but now want to follow further Jüngel's thinking in *God*.

God is more than necessary

Jüngel sees Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* diagnosing the modern situation of thought about God correctly: the development has been towards human autonomy for which the hypothesis of God is not a necessity for understanding or acting in the world. This "worldly nonnecessity of God" is at the heart of modern atheism. But it can also be interpreted in Christian terms. It helps to expose how unchristian is the concept of God rejected by this atheism: "atheism can be rejected only if one overcomes theism" (p.43). It is a challenge to think God anew. Bonhoeffer pointed the way in his remarks linking the crucifixion of Jesus with God's presence and absence and even with God's being. But above all Hegel, in conscious dependence on Luther, saw that christology could inform a concept of God which could take "the death of God" seriously as a moment of truth in God himself. God's being is in becoming, and death is a moment in this. So talk of the death of God could be genuinely Christian rather than atheist.

If God is "pushed out of the world onto the cross" (Bonhoeffer) and the world can be understood in its own terms without him, does that mean that God is simply unnecessary? Here Jüngel introduces one of his key concepts: God is more than necessary. This means that God is not just in a relation of freedom with the world but that he offers a whole new possibility to it. That God is love and that he loves the world is not something that can inferred from the world – God has created the world as a sphere with its own integrity. One of Jüngel's striking ways of putting this is in three propositions:

> "(a) Man and his world are interesting for their own sake.
> (b) Even more so, God is interesting for his own sake.
> (c) God makes man, who is interesting for his own sake, interesting in a new way." (p.34)

This new way of being interesting is given as the possibility that revelation brings. This revelation utterly respects the freedom and integrity of the world (to the point of dying rather than coercing it or becoming necessary to it) and this involves a mode of presence which is not an omnipresence understood as a sort of superlative worldly presence. "The being of God is in fact to be thought of as a being which explodes the alternative of presence and absence" (p.62). Just as the word of a person may represent presence through absence, the death of Jesus is an absence conveyed in "in the word of the cross" and acting as the catalyst of new possibilities. The presence of God can be rethought as the withdrawal of his omnipotence, and his omnipotence as the withdrawal of his omnipresence.

In the course of this presentation Jüngel comes nearest to giving what might be seen as a rational framework for this theology in the Pannenberg mode. He explores the most radical question of all: why is there something rather than nothing? In existential terms this is about the threat of non-being. This is not an experience in any ordinary sense but is "an experience with experience" (p.32). It can take shape as anxiety, but also as gratitude for being which need not necessarily be. Revelation makes it possible that this experience with experience is unambiguously one of gratitude. Talk about God has its proper location in relation to this experience regarding being and non-being. So God is experienced as "the one who distinguishes between being and not being and who decides in favour of being" (p.34). The distinguishing mark of the Christian God is that he is not above the contradiction of being and non-being but "is God *in the midst* of this contradiction" (p.35).

In what sense is this not a Heideggerian version of Pannenberg's anthropological grounding of talk of God? It has been interpreted as this, but the vital difference is in its non-foundational role in the argument. It has the status of a way of understanding things that may be helpful, but it is not a systematic framework.

The philosophy of Hegel is the other possible candidate offering a foundation but Jüngel does not follow him all the way. He affirms Hegel as a Lutheran reinterpreter of modern atheism in the interest of a more Christian concept of God, but criticizes him for failing to differentiate God and humanity satisfactorily. The crucial point concerns the necessity of God's relation to creation. Jüngel sees Hegel conceiving the world as necessary to God. So in Hegel's scheme it is not possible to do justice to God as more than necessary or to have a proper conception of both the relationship and the distinction between God and humanity. Much of the rest of the book is an attempt to do better than Hegel in this, and in particular Jüngel's new concept of analogy (discussed below) deals with the problem.

Speech precedes thought

Jüngel discusses Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Feuerbach and Nietzsche in their thought of God. The overall verdict is that they all, in various ways, presuppose the God of metaphysical theism whose absoluteness cannot accommodate the "word of the cross" or the primacy of love. Descartes' God is typical: necessary, omnipotent in a way that is completely alien to weakness, and his omnipresence conceived on the model of the clearly comprehending ego as the place of true presence. Such an assessment has been fairly common in recent theology (though one might wish that the very different recovery of Descartes' God by Emmanuel Levinas were taken seriously), but Jüngel introduces in addition a proposal as to what the characteristic new move made by such thinkers was. He sums it up: "Human thought now found its natural place between God's essence and God's existence" (p.109). The relationship of human thought to God was defined in a new way by Descartes. God was seen as necessary because of the need of a superior being to ground the continuity of the thinking ego. So God's existence was tied to a human need. At the same time, by contrast, the essence of God was defined in line with traditional metaphysics as absolute and not dependent on any human relation.

It was inevitable that this should lead to insoluble problems, and Jüngel traces this history through several positions: Fichte's denial of the conceivability of God in response to Kant's denial of the knowability of God; Feuerbach's claim that thinking of God is the fulfilment of human thought and does not involve the existence of God; and Nietzsche's questioning of the conceivability and existence of God. In each, human thought has set itself the task of deciding, according to self-generated criteria, about God. Is there any other way?

Jüngel's proposal is twofold: God must be thought so that no distinction is allowed between his existence and essence; and thought itself must be conceived so that in perceiving existence it does not separate it from essence. In short, we need to "learn to think both God and thought anew" (p.154).

As regards thought, Jüngel rejects one modern tendency to see it as self-grounding and primary in relation to outward expression. Instead he follows another modern tendency to see thought as secondary to language. "That thought *can* form concepts at all is made possible by an even more original fact, the fact of addressing language" (p.167). It is like an amendment of Paul's dictum to read: faith and thought come by hearing. So Jüngel says that "the place of the conceivability of God is a Word which precedes thought" (p.155). It is the event of being addressed that allows God to be thought. It is a whole history of encounter with God that allows the possibility of conceiving him. This means that thought is not self-grounded, and that thought of God follows faith in God by claiming a certainty that involves trust in a word.

As regards God, I will now present the pivotal concept.

God's unity with perishability

Both the Bible and modern thought demand, in Jüngel's view, a rethinking of the relation of God to perishability (*Vergänglichkeit* – Webster renders it "transience", which is more elegant but not quite as strong). Perishability is usually seen as purely negative, but it can also be understood positively, as the chance for new possibility to emerge. The full actuality of the death of God on the cross must be affirmed, but actuality is not all reality. Possibility is the "ontological plus" and not less real than the actual. This primacy of the possible is what allows Jüngel to conceptualize the death of God. God is overflowing being, whose reality is in possibility as well as actuality. So the key formulation is: "that which is ontologically positive about perishability is the possibility" (p.213).

Above all, the word brings possibility. Even the far off past, which has lost its reality, can have possibilities through the word. Annihilation, nothingness, is of course an alternative, but that is not a necessity. So "the positive meaning of talk about the death of God would then imply that God *is* in the midst of the struggle between nothingness and possibility" (p.217). The cross means that God involves himself in nothingness, in death, and resists its annihilating power, enabling the new possibility given in the resurrection. God both identifies himself with death and differentiates himself from it. In narrative terms that is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because it is done for others it is love. And conceptually it leads to the replacement of the distinction between the essence and existence of God by the differentiation of Father from Son.

I apologize for the extreme compression and density of such a summary! But it might best be taken as a mapping exercise which is aimed partly at giving some impression of the main contours of the book and partly at being a travellers' guide for those who do follow me in reading it. It has taken three readings to get this far!

In great dissimilarity, even greater similarity

The vital role of language in Jüngel's thought requires that theological language be closely studied. His concept of God's involvement in death raises the obvious question as to what differentiates God from humanity, which was also the point at which he most severely criticized Hegel. Traditionally too the issue of language was central to the attempt to avoid idolatry and anthropomorphism in relation to God. Jüngel tackles this head-on through the question of analogy. How can human language genuinely speak of God without undermining his difference?

Jüngel does a complex analysis of the tradition of analogous talk about God, giving special attention to Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas and Kant. He finds the basic principle to be that in using any term of God, for all the similarity of God to the term (humanly understood), one must affirm an even greater dissimilarity. Or, for all the nearness of God one must affirm an even greater distance. In the interests of the difference of God from the the world, the last word is always with the negative way, saying that God is inexpressible mystery. So language is used to deny language.

Jüngel's alternative is strikingly simple. His formula is: for all the great dissimilarity between God and humanity, there is an even greater similarity. God has freely become human, whereas the other tradition in effect does not permit God to be human. Moreover, that tradition does not allow God to come in language: it implies a non-lingual relationship with humanity and a mystery that is most properly related to in ways other than through language. But the New Testament idea of *mystērion* is of a mystery that must be spoken, that happens as an event in speech. "In contrast with the negative concept of mystery, the New Testament designates that to be a mystery which must be *said* at all costs and which may under no circumstances be kept silent . . . The public realm belongs . . . to the essence of the mystery." (p.250). The suppression of this meaning of mystery is a "dark puzzle" and has had devastating effects on speech and thought of God. Its only excuse is that it has tried to maintain the distinction of God and humanity. But it has done so at the cost of Christian understanding of God. So the challenge to Jüngel is to affirm both the gospel of a God of love, whose nearness is not qualified by an even greater distance, and a proper distinction between creator and creature.

His solution is to reverse the relations of similarity and dissimilarity. In the light of the gospel, and above all of the cross, one can take the step of saying that God's difference from us is always even more a difference in love: his transcendence is not understood only through his self-relatedness but also through his even greater selflessness. His very being realizes itself "*in the midst of such great self-relatedness as still greater selflessness*, and is as such *love*" (p.298). That is the ontological statement corresponding to the hermeneutical statement about analogy as the still greater similarity in the midst of great dissimilarity. It is the conceptual heart of the book, and I will pay special critical attention to it later.

Meanwhile, the further linguistic content that is given to this concept of analogy needs examining. The idea is that God comes in an event of speech, which is called the "analogy of advent". God introduces himself by using the language of the world. The clue to how this works is found in metaphor and especially in parable, which Jüngel understands as a narrative form of metaphor. In parables, ordinary, obvious aspects of the world (treasure in a field, a father and his prodigal son) are taken up and talked about so that they correspond to the relation of God to the world. The result is that God does not appear primarily as dissimilar or beyond words but that through the ordinariness and obviousness of the parable the even greater ordinariness and obviousness of God and his Kingdom can be seen. The stories of the treasure or the prodigal son create a new ordinariness which is analogously related to treasure and prodigals through the event of the parable being told. What happens is that x (God) comes to a (the world) with the help of b (the father) and c (the prodigal). So $x \rightarrow a = b{:}c$. But in this event God does not remain an x, but introduces himself afresh. The whole gospel has this parabolic character of an address which introduces God through an ordinary narrative and in doing so creates a new, eschatological ordinariness.

So in the way parables work Jüngel finds the basic clue to the problem of analogy. In parables there is both a differentiation of the Kingdom of God from whatever it is compared with and also an even greater similarity. As the hearer is drawn into the free, playful process of realizing the richness of the similarities, so he or she can be converted to the new reality of the Kingdom of God. Jüngel even claims that "basically all language forms of faith participate in the structure of parabolic language" (p.293). The further question is clearly: how does he work this out in relation to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

"The humanity of God as a story to be told"

Jüngel sees the story of Jesus as the ordinariness through which "the humanity of God" is communicated. Where is God? In unity with this man for the sake of all. But that is a concept which can only be thought in the first place by following the story of Jesus. Narrative has a primacy in theology because of the temporal, event character of God's love. Other types of theology are needed, but "that thinking which wants to understand God will always be led back to narrative. The thought of God can be thought only as the telling of a story, whereby the concepts are to be carefully controlled" (p.303).

This fundamentally affects the character of Christian theology. The consciousness with which it thinks is inextricably entangled in this story. There is a narrative depth structure to our reason and we can only in thinking correspond to God by "constantly telling the story anew" (p.304). What about the factuality of the story? Jüngel stresses the way in which past history can liberate new possibilities and so is more interested in the possibility than the factuality of the historical events. Yet he also affirms that "the story of Jesus Christ cannot arrive at the 'truth of the point' apart from the 'truth of the factual', while the parable can be indifferent to the 'truth of the factual'" (p.309). Unfortunately, despite the fact that this is a vital matter in the dispute with Pannenberg, Jüngel does not show how his factuality is to be understood.

The theological interpretation of the story of Jesus is the main theme of the rest of the book. Apart from a fascinating aside on the church – calling it an "institution of narration" (p.312) – the focus is on the Trinity as a conceptual unfolding of that story, and on both story and Trinity as ways of expressing the God of love.

God is love: the Trinitarian mystery of the world

The whole book comes together in the final part, as the string of crucial concepts unite in a doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine is not well developed. It is sketched in a number of sections on love, faith, Jesus Christ, the differentiation of Father, Son and Spirit and the Trinity as the mystery of the world. It serves, however, to fulfil what the subtitle of the book promises – a "foundation" (*Begründung*) for a theology of the crucified one.

"To think God as love is the task of theology" (p.315). In doing this, theology must do justice to our experience of love as well as to God. So Jüngel meditates on human love in order to connect our experience with key concepts derived from the story of Jesus. Love is, formally, the

event of still greater selflessness in great self-relatedness. Materially, love is the unity of life and death for the sake of life. Relationally, love is related to a specific other and is fulfilled in the exchange of mutual surrender, a dielectic of being in freedom. The self in love is received in a new way through the love of the other, and is also newly vulnerable. This weakness in love means dying to all that is not love and uniting life and death in favour of life.

Jüngel links this meditation into his description of the Trinity as the living unity of life and death, demonstrated in the story of Jesus Christ. The man Jesus is the pointer to the Trinity (the *vestigum trinitatis*). Jüngel accepts Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as at the heart of his ministry: "One can say that Jesus' entire humanity was so unlimitedly moulded by his proclamation of the Kingdom of God that his humanity is virtually defined by it" (p.353). His parables were the distinctive way in which he did this in language, enabling the "new obviousness" of the Kingdom of God and the quality of reconciliation to become evident. But the Kingdom (and opposition to it) is inseparable from his own person. Therefore what happened to this person is crucial. For Jüngel, Jesus "let God be the God who prevailed in every act of his life" (p.358). His humanity "consisted of the freedom to want to be nothing at all *for himself* . . . There is nothing here of balance between selflessness and self-relatedness. The *being* of this man was rather the *event* of a selflessness which surpasses all self-relatedness . . . As such, it was the being of a man who corresponded to God, and it was the human parable of the God who is love" (p.358).

So what happened in this man's death? The identity of Christianity hangs on this. Death itself is not really an event, but the ending of the event of a life. The first thing to be said about the death of Jesus is that, in the light of the resurrection proclamation, something did happen in the death of Jesus. The "difficult thought" that Jüngel is led to is that "in this death God himself was the event that happened . . . It is a thought which Christian theology has constantly evaded. But it is a necessary thought. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead means that God has identified himself with this dead man. And that immediately means that God identified himself with Jesus' God-forsakenness. And that means further that God identified himself with the life lived by this dead man" (p.363).

But what does this identification mean? It is a self-definition of God which involves a self-differentiation. God differentiates himself from himself in the event of this death, and conceptually the result is the need to think of God as Trinity. "The Trinity conceptualizes the passion history of God" (p.371). The axioms of absoluteness, *apatheia* and immutability are rejected. Instead of the Cartesian separation of the essence from the existence of God, love is seen as both God's essence and, in the crucified one, his existence. God comes from God as love, which is a way of saying he is God the Father. God comes to God as love, which is a way of saying he is God the Son. And in this differentiation there is an event of eternally new relationship: God comes as God the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son constitutes the unity of the divine as that event which is love itself by preserving the differentiation" (p.374).

All this love overflows and is for us: God desires to set us on fire with his love, and "for that to happen, the human *word* is needed which allows the triune God to be expressed in language in that it tells the story of Jesus Christ as God's history with all people" (pp.376f). Jüngel ends the book with almost a sermon on human participation through faith, love and hope. Common to each is a structure of self in which "we do not have ourselves" (p.390). We relate to the invisible God who comes into the world and addresses us. In faith we are freed from fixation on ourselves by the "liberating experience of God as the mystery of the world which makes man himself a mystery" (p.391). In love we can correspond to the God of love and so be truly human, sharing in the mystery of God without losing our differentiation from him. Hope is for the future of love, including the transformation of our earthly existence. In all this we become ever more human in relation with the God who "is that love which can neither be surreptitiously gained nor coerced, which is entirely unnecessary and thus is more than necessary" (p.396).

Webster's introduction

How does John Webster deal with this complex position? In the first place he contextualises it well. For readers from the English-speaking world he is attentive to ways in which Jüngel is difficult or likely to be misunderstood for cultural reasons. He also offers translations of quotations which usually show how Darrel Guder could have done better with *God* (although the ultimate in inept translation in that book is not from the German but from Jüngel's frequent use of Latin, which is rendered as if by someone without any knowledge of the language consulting a dictionary). Webster is also attentive to Jüngel's development and is good at identifying key elements – the influence of Fuchs on Jüngel's thought about language, the new stress on ordinariness in *God*'s treatment of parables, the priority always given to the reality of God's prevenient gift of himself to the world and the correlative move of identifying God through the history of Jesus Christ, and the central significance of Jüngel's book on Barth's doctrine of the Trinity.

As regards *God*, Webster is careful in his account, though his way of dividing his discussion of the book leaves the reader without a coherent overview of it and without a sense of how the key concepts interanimate each other. Throughout his discussion he offers comments and very occasionally a more lengthy critique, and the points he makes are always worth noting.

A recurring criticism is that Jüngel's whole approach and way of thinking is too "monistic", too lacking in specific attention to the variety, discontinuities, paradoxes, and sheer ungeneralizable particularity of reality. This is applied to many areas. Jüngel is accused of having too limited a set of partners in dialogue, excluding Marx, Freud, most theology and philosophy in English, and any significant restatements of natural theology. His own "authorities" are seen to be lacking in variety and in the ability to question radically the overall coherence that he offers. A similar problem is detected in Jüngel's use of "language" as all-encompassing – he does not seem to do justice to the role of action in reality. And within language

Webster questions the way metaphor (and its narrative form, parable) is given primacy to the neglect of other forms of speech. The New Testament is also constrained to focus systematically on "the word of the cross", and its pluralism and contexts are not given theological weight. Above all, Jesus Christ is the all-embracing reality through whom ontological coherence is found, and it is hard to see how other reality retains its particularity and integrity. In short, Webster thinks Jüngel's thinking is not "polymorphous" enough and that the conceptual economy which I have traced above is bought at the price of fidelity to reality in all its diversity. In the next section I will develop some of these points in my own way, but it is worth noting that Webster does not clearly identify the key issue underlying many of these criticisms: it is the same as that between Pannenberg and Barth which I referred to at the beginning of this article, and it has to do with the form of coherence appropriate to Christian theology and the very possibility of conceiving "other reality" in the way Webster suggests.

Webster has various other criticisms. He congratulates Jüngel on doing better than Barth in handling human freedom and the openness of history, but still questions whether there is a deep ambiguity at the heart of Jüngel's understanding of humanity. On the one hand, God is not necessary and so we can be genuinely human without God; on the other hand, humanity is only itself by expressing God. Perhaps Jüngel could respond by both developing his ideas of "more than necessary" and freedom, and also by making clearer how far his anthropology is eschatological. But the fundamental issue undoubtedly remains the Barthian challenge to any concept of human freedom that is not secondary to God's freedom. Webster also finds Jüngel defective in the place he gives to human ethical deliberation and action, in his sketchy treatment of the Holy Spirit, in his inadequate treatment of Aquinas on analogy, in his inappropriate way of handling the natural world (e.g. through seeing it as of parabolic significance in theology) and in his account of the resurrection of Jesus as an event of disclosure and not an event in temporal continuity with the crucifixion. Perhaps most fundamentally of all, he asks whether Jüngel's idea of the death of God does away with God as almighty and free. I will try to think through some of these issues.

Parable and gospel: a serious error

As Webster says, Jüngel does do less than justice to the diversity of forms of language, but this needs to be made more specific. His thought about metaphor and parable is brilliant and largely convincing, but he makes one serious error. Not content with enabling the parables to address and grip us more powerfully, he goes on to embrace the whole gospel story in the category of parable. The key difference is seen to be that the gospel claims the "truth of the factual" as well as the "truth of the point" of a parable.

This assimilation of gospel to parable is not argued for persuasively and it is hard to justify. The gospel is an unusual genre, and it is hardly understood adequately by identifying it with one of the genres which it contains in itself. It embraces various types of discourse, mostly not parabolic, and overall it is probably better characterized as "realistic narrative". It tells of characters and events in interaction over time in varied circumstances and uses many forms to do this. Ironically, the work that could have saved Jüngel from this error, Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, is mentioned by him in a footnote, but it does not seem to have been taken seriously. A further irony is that Barth's interpretation of the gospels seems much more sensitive than Jüngel on this point.

Why does Jüngel miss it? Partly because the thinking of such mentors as Fuchs and Heidegger has no place for it. Also, in line with their thought and with much current hermeneutics, he is deeply concerned with how a genre "works" on the hearer or reader. The parable theory is attractive in offering an interactive understanding of the gospel which makes the dynamics of "addressing language" primary. Within the New Testament this seems appropriate to parables, letters, sayings and speeches, but it is dangerous to impose it on the whole of a gospel. Perhaps one of the marks of a gospel is that it is less tied to being grasped only in a certain sort of "event" of reception. It does a much more thorough job of rendering its own world of meaning. Above all it is concerned to identify Jesus by words, actions and events, and this can "work" in a wide variety of ways, none of them necessarily systematically connected with the genre of the story.

Whatever the reasons, the consequences of Jüngel's move are important. Firstly, he is led to distinguish gospel from parable using the categories of "fact" and "point". As I noted above, he does not make clear what "fact" involves. He avoids Pannenberg's attempt to give a historical critical justification of the factual truth of some gospel events. But he is forced by his categories into giving some sort of account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in terms that can stand critical scrutiny. His solution is to offer a sort of minimalist characterization of Jesus in terms of his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, especially in parables, and the opposition to it culminating in his death, but to rule the resurrection completely out as far as Pannenberg's sort of investigation goes. He is in danger of having the worst of both worlds. On the one hand, he has given up Barth's thoroughgoing reliance for his theological reflection on the story as told in the New Testament. On the other hand, he is not prepared to go along all the way with Pannenberg's critical historical *Wissenschaft*. Some of the most persistent problems in modern christology are involved in this dilemma, but it would at least help Jüngel get further with his approach if he were to free the gospels from too close an identification with parables and their way of working on their audience.

Secondly, the primacy he gives parable leads him into general anthropological statements about narrative and human existence and general methodological statements about narrative in theology (see especially *God* Chap. V Section 19). This has several disadvantages. It brings him dangerously close to the Pannenberg method he wants to avoid. It is not clear whether it furthers his main argument at all (but perhaps, as I have argued for his treatment of being and non-being, it is not meant to function as foundation or framework, merely as an illuminating suggestion). And it does not do justice to the complex pluralism and interrelation of genres both in the

Bible and theology. Might it not be that the Trinity itself is a doctrine whose logic is closely linked to the pluralism of genres – maybe e.g. realistic narrative is primary in identifying the Son but metaphor is more central in relation to the Spirit, and that the mode of their interrelation should be one of coinherence not subordination?

Analogy and similarity

One of Jüngel's strengths is his insistence on the importance of analogy. This is in striking contrast with his colleague Moltmann, whose treatment of the same theme of "the crucified God" seems philosophically naive as a result. The flatfootedness of Moltmann's ascription of suffering and death to God is avoided by Jüngel, who maintains that the dissimilarity between God and humanity is still vital. The danger with talk of similarity and dissimilarity is that it misses that dimension of incomparability which the tradition of analogy wanted to affirm. Jüngel is playing for high stakes in his reversal of the balance towards similarity because it might compromise the incomparability of God: *deus non est in genere*. He is acutely aware of the risk and tries brilliantly to avoid it in his various affirmations of the differentiation between God and humanity. But even greater is his concern to criticize the tradition for being insufficiently Christian in its concept of God. If God has freely and fully identified himself in Jesus Christ then Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the being of God and it is wrong to allow dissimilarity to have the last word. An alternative to the analogical way would be that of paradox but Jüngel does not take that. Instead he courageously formulates his concept of analogy and follows it through with a doctrine of the Trinity based on the very event that was most awkward for the traditional understanding, the death of Jesus Christ. God is incomparable because he is the God of love revealed in this event and person.

The final question must therefore be about this issue specified in the subtitle of the book, but first it is worth asking about the adequacy of his concept of analogy. It seems to me to be right in exposing the non-Trinitarian nature of the God presupposed by many traditional concepts and by the theism and atheism of modern times. Specifically on the issue of language he is convincing in his attack on the idea of mystery as being beyond words and his affirmation of a mystery which is essentially communicative. The logic of his reversal of the relationship between similarity and dissimilarity is straightforward, and it keeps the appropriate dissimilarity through the stress on the initiative and freedom of God. Yet it does raise a problem. Why be so concerned to assert the *greater* similarity? The answer ultimately is probably to do with his idea of love and the role of identification in it. Yet one could perhaps have all the benefits of Jüngel's idea of analogy while making it more Trinitarian. Why speak in pseudo-quantitative language? Is that not what the Trinitarian resolution of the subordinationist controversy avoided? Why not in the idea of analogy have a concept of *coinherence* which preserves differentiation and otherness without even trying to assess a greater or a lesser? Then in the "analogy of advent" God could be understood to introduce himself in a way more thoroughly appropriate to what Jüngel wants to affirm, the identification of the immanent and the economic Trinity.

The death of God

There is no avoiding a final grappling with the major constructive suggestion of the book, that the death of Jesus is the death of God and that this is the basis of a doctrine of the Trinity. It is put with Lutheran audacity and a Hegelian conceptuality modified by Jüngel's notion of possibility. At its heart is the logic of love as self-giving, where the process is defined through the gospel story and the self is understood through Hegel.

Let us start with a crude question: why is it that the New Testament, on which Jüngel rests his main argument, says that God raised from the dead but not that God died? This, it seems to me, is the chief reason for the tradition's reluctance to talk as Hegel and Jüngel do. So how can Jüngel justify his statements? The appeal is to the conceptual implications of the story. This seems a legitimate move. Just as it is possible to speak a language for years without ever conceptualizing its grammar and syntax, so it might have been possible for the early church to have a gospel which identified God in the way Jüngel suggests without them ever finding an appropriate conceptuality for it. This is a plausible way of accounting for the long time it took the doctrine of the Trinity to be formulated (if you think that is appropriate to the gospel story!). A further twist would then be to say with Jüngel that the Trinitarian reconception of God did not go far enough because it failed to take the death of Jesus seriously enough.

Yet such a fundamental innovation in relation to the New Testament is still open to question. It can be made more acceptable by examining more closely what Jüngel does. He is not only reconceiving God in the light of this story but is reconceiving *death* too. His idea of death is not that of the Old Testament or New Testament texts but is defined in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is death relativized by the death of Jesus. It is no longer the sort of absolute negative which it is inappropriate to ascribe to God. In the New Testament there are the grounds for saying that God dies (so long as you allow your previous notions of both God and death to be transformed by reference to the gospel), but the idea of death is usually used in the text in its ordinary meaning which it is not right to apply to God.

I am inclined to go along with that, but still find a grave problem with Jüngel's position. Is it not too neat? Can death really be done justice to like this? It can be a powerful point in changing our conceptuality and in affecting our existential self-understanding, but what about the material side of death? The death of Jesus is at least about blood, brain death and a dead body, and it happens in space and time; and the resurrection too needs to have some relation to all this. Jüngel never squarely faces this. To do so would require a doctrine of creation which takes some account of the physical sciences and the nature of time and material reality. He gains the rhetorical advantage of having to do with reality in all its particularity and messiness by making the death of Jesus central. But he does not take full responsibility for this move. The focus is too easily shifted to this event as

parabolic of God. He can talk of truth interrupting the continuity of life, but the content of the interruption is more linguistic than physical. Likewise his crucial concept of possibility needs working through at the physical as well as the linguistic and existential levels. This need not mean adopting some natural theological framework, but it does require, especially in relation to the assurance that death is not the end of possibility, that this discourse be connected responsibly with the most obvious feature of Jesus on the cross, his dead body.

What sort of theology?

That last point might be taken to be advocating Pannenberg's way of trying to integrate a theological perspective with other disciplines. In a review of Pannenberg's *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (in *King's Theological Review* no. 10, 1987, pp.21-25) Christoph Schwöbel concludes that Pannenberg runs the risk of reversing the relationship in his title and offering a theology in anthropological perspective. That is what Jüngel thinks of Pannenberg and it is what he himself most wants to avoid. Yet it is possible to be sympathetic with his basic decision (to have as his integrator the identification of God through the story of Jesus Christ in the context of the story of Israel, and to disallow any more general framework than that) without cutting off dialogue and the possibility of a whole range of *ad hoc* relationships which could be mutually illuminating. Jüngel in fact does this with Heidegger, Nietzsche and others, and his strategy in relation to metaphysics (to have free, controversial dialogue for the sake of both disciplines) should be extended to other areas. Where Webster's accusation of "monism" is valid is in criticizing the range of real dialogue, and also in suggesting that the gospel story itself might warrant a theology less confident of its correspondences and more sensitive to fragmentariness, intractable contradictions and the dark mystery of evil. The result might look like the theology of Barth appropriated with more of the interrogative tone of Donald MacKinnon.

Perhaps part of the problem is simply to do with the genre of Jüngel's own theology. It is the theology of a superb lecturer and preacher and has affinities with the lecture and the sermon, both of which have a tendency to the monological. In line with them it gives primacy to "address" but the thinking behind it is typically, as he says himself, "slow and solitary". That solitary thought is a vital moment in theological life is true, but the question is how satisfactorily to do justice to the variety of conversations, challenges and calls to joint adventures in thought required by the joint, ecclesial character of Christian theology.

But none of this should obscure the achievement of Jüngel in *God*. He calls it a "study book", and it makes the most exacting demands on the student. Yet it is well worth the struggle to follow the thought. I hope a sense of the richness as well as the difficulty has come across in this article. It is a theology of the crucified God which helps to articulate that mystery as central to existence. It identifies the key issues, never shirks the labour of thinking them through and is always fruitful in insights and concepts. Above all it achieves the remarkable feat of delivering the gospel message in a rigorously intellectual way which yet does not domesticate it. One is engaged intellectually and spiritually at the same time in a sustained, intense way as Jüngel tries to "think God and thought anew". Faced with the rather dull and boring doctrines of God that abound, it is stimulating to have one which does succeed in speaking of a "God who is interesting for his own sake", in the light of whom our world and existence, including theology, seem "interesting in a new way". More than that, he even dares to affirm that to think something for its own sake is a matter of wonder and joy and that this is at the heart of Christian theology: "For 'faith' you might say 'joy in God' . . . Joy in God is the source of genuine thinking of God" (p.192).