

DAVID BRUNER

# Eberhard Jüngel on God, Truth, and History

*Dogmatik in der Moderne*

42

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Dogmatik in der Moderne

herausgegeben von

Christian Danz, Jörg Dierken, Hans-Peter Großhans  
und Friederike Nüssel

42





David Bruner

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Truth, and History

Mohr Siebeck

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*To Becca*

*Sine qua non*



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## Frequently Cited Works

The following frequently cited works are all by Eberhard Jüngel. After the first citation, they will for the most part be cited internally and with the following abbreviations. When appropriate, I have included pagination from the German edition after a slash. For full citations, see bibliography.

GBB	God's Being is in Becoming
GMW	God as the Mystery of the World
Essays	Theological Essays
TE	Theologische Erörterungen
J	Justification



# Introduction

## A. Jüngel on truth

Christian theology begins in response to an astonished confession of faith: one man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the truth (John 14.6). The truth to which Christians cling, the wisdom that guides their lives, the Word that created the cosmos – John identifies them with this one person. Jesus is not simply a teacher of truth, or a parable indicating a higher religious consciousness: he is the truth itself. Whatever sorts of claims Christian theology might wish to make about the nature of truth, they must be compatible with this simple yet endlessly provocative assertion.

Indeed, confessing one's faith in this incarnate truth immediately presents a set of theological and conceptual questions, and this deceptively simple passage opens up some of the church's most complex doctrinal debates. As an example we can consider the development of what we might now call conciliar Christology in the church's third and fourth centuries. The history of these crucial debates is complex and the literature surrounding them vast.<sup>1</sup> But at the risk of oversimplifying, it is helpful to note that these Christological debates can be glossed as articulating a series of responses to John 14.6. Exponents of pro-Nicene theology rejected a variety of contrary positions at least in part because they unacceptably weakened the link between the human Christ and divine truth. If Christ were a creature, rather than eternally begotten of the Father, the veracity of the picture of God gained from looking at Jesus could be called into question. Similarly, a variety of Chalcedonian thinkers rejected Nestorian counterparts because they weakened John 14.6, as it were, on the other side. Nestorian distaste at language that emphasized the profound humanity of the incarnate Word, up to and including his involvement in the somatic exigencies of human life, correspondingly weakened the affirmation that the human Jesus was the truth. Over against the Christologies it rejected, the church's conciliar legacy must be read as leaning into 'the scandal of

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<sup>1</sup> To dip one's toes in the ocean, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

particularity,' as it is often called, and seeking to preserve the mystery confessed by the church of divine truth in human flesh.

In the modern period the 'scandal of particularity' became an object of debate in a different way. As historical-critical methods of reading Scripture began to become influential, a new awareness of the historical distance between biblical authors and their contemporary readers began to arise. To understand Scripture, it began to seem, was to place it in its historical context: to understand the original languages, cultural context, and political currents that shaped it. But to place it in its context was to raise the question of how that context related to our own. What makes this 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestinian Jew, part of such an obviously unique and relative cultural and historical moment, the definitive revelation of the truth about God? To paraphrase the famous question of Gotthold Lessing, with what right do we identify the contingent truths of Jesus' personal history with the necessary truths of human life?<sup>2</sup>

Among contemporary theologians, no one is more attentive to the sorts of issues raised in these thumbnail sketches than Eberhard Jüngel (b. 1934). A giant of German theology, throughout Jüngel's long career in Berlin, Zürich, and Tübingen, he was considered equal in stature to other figures like Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Throughout his writings, one encounters a keen and persistent awareness of the issues raised by the church's confession of Jesus as truth. Jüngel can even use John 14.6 as a kind of summary of the whole Christian approach to the topic: "The truth to which the Christian faith owes itself is concrete and has a name. In the gospel of John (14.6), the truth is in fact properly identified with a person: *I am the way and the truth*... asserts the Johannine Christ."<sup>3</sup>

This book is about Jüngel's response to the theological questions posed by John 14:6; in particular, it is about his understanding of truth and history. In so doing, it seeks to highlight Jüngel's engagement with the *Wahrheitsfrage*. Anglophone reception of Jüngel has largely, though not exclusively, focused on his contributions to the doctrine of God, and, to a lesser extent, his account of theological analogy.<sup>4</sup> These are indeed essential aspects of his thought, with

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<sup>2</sup> For an illustration of the problematic, as well as a proposed resolution, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–77) IV/1, e.g. §59.

<sup>3</sup> "Die Wahrheit des Christentums," in *Beziehungsreich: Perspektiven des Glaubens* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2002), 117–30. See similar invocations of the passage in "Value-Free Truth," in *Essays 2:193–4*. For takes on the problem of faith and history, see e.g. "The Effectiveness of Christ Withdrawn," in *Essays 1:214–31*; "You Talk Like a Book..." in *Essays 2:20–34*; as well as the entire introduction to *GMW*.

<sup>4</sup> The two best early books on Jüngel in English both address his doctrine of God: John Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to His Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). And Paul J. DeHart, *Beyond the Necessary God: Trinitarian Faith and Philosophy in the Thought of Eberhard Jüngel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999). A

much more remaining to be written about them. But it is important to note that Jüngel has more to contribute to theology than reflections on these topics. Focusing on Jüngel's distinctive interest in questions of truth – a topic which no previous published monograph makes its sole focus – makes clearer the breadth of his interests and contributions as a thinker.<sup>5</sup>

Jüngel engaged the topic of truth throughout his career; his most well-known writings on the topic are a series of seminal essays from the mid-point in his career, now available in English.<sup>6</sup> These writings are indispensable for any substantive evaluation of the topic, and they will occupy center stage in chapter two. I will argue, however, that our understanding of Jüngel's alethiology should not limit itself to the writings in his *oeuvre* that explicitly engage truth. The substance of Jüngel's reflections is not exhausted by his explicit engagements with the topic. In particular, once the interpreter grasps the essential significance of the 'word-event' or 'speech-event' motif for his alethiology – a topic we will explore at length in chapter one – a broader horizon of interpretation opens up. Jüngel's explicit account of truth contains

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strong recent treatment focusing on Jüngel's doctrine of God and anthropology is Piotr Malysz, *Trinity, Freedom and Love: An Engagement with the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). A close examination of the thinker's understanding of authentic existence is found in Deborah Casewell, *Eberhard Jüngel and Existence: Being Before the Cross* (London: Routledge, 2021). For Jüngel on analogy, see "A Critique of the Theology of Right," in John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Archie J. Spencer, *The Analogy of Faith: The Quest for God's Speakability* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015). Joseph Palakeel, *The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective* (Roma: Pontificia università gregoriana, 1995). Philip A. Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> For predecessor engagements with Jüngel on truth, see Paul Hinlicky, "Metaphorical Truth and the Language of Christian Theology," in R. David Nelson and Piotr Malysz, eds., *Indicative of Grace, Imperative of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Eberhard Jüngel in His 80th Year* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 89–100. Jonathan Case, "Disputation and Interruption: Truth, Trinity, and the Death of Christ in Wolfhart Pannenberg and Eberhard Jüngel" (PhD diss., Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 1995). For Jüngel's understanding of Christology and its relation to his understanding of language, see R. David Nelson, *The Interruptive Word: Eberhard Jüngel on the Sacramental Structure of God's Relation to the World* (London: T&T Clark, 2013). For brief treatments of Jüngel on truth that have influenced this study, see Ingolf U. Dalferth, "God and the Mystery of Words," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 1 (1992): 79–104. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Radical Theology: An Essay on Faith and Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> See "Metaphorical Truth," in *Essays* 1:16–71, originally published in 1974; "Value-Free Truth," in *Essays* 2:191–215, from 1979, and "Even the Beautiful Must Die," *ibid.* from 1984. See also the stand-alone English essay "The Truth of Life," in Richard W. A. McKinney, ed., *Creation, Christ, and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976), 231–6.



an implicit understanding of how truth functions with regard to other doctrinal loci. His explicit presentation of other doctrinal loci implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) recapitulates his account of truth as a word-event. In chapters three and four, we will engage a variety of doctrinal loci, in order to show how they presume or develop Jüngel's account of truth.

In this work I argue that Jüngel's understanding of truth is essentially 'historical,' that is, temporal and timely. Truth for Jüngel is fundamentally an event, a happening, an occurrence: something temporal, particular, and concrete rather than atemporal, general, and abstract. In the next section of this chapter, I refine more precisely what I mean by the frustratingly slippery word 'historical' – as we shall see, not everything that trades under that label can be accurately applied to Jüngel's thought. In particular, I will characterize Jüngel's alethiology as 'eschatological historicism.' On one hand, for Jüngel, the truth of the Christian gospel is not one piece of historical data among others, passively available at the disposal of the knowing human subject. Describing truth as an 'event,' and not as a fact, tradition, or text, is designed to emphasize this eschatological non-giveness. But it is equally true to say that by describing truth as a 'word-event,' Jüngel emphasizes both the way in which the truth is always mediated through a particular language and so through a particular historical context, and takes place in a particular moment in someone's life journey. This is the case all across the line in his work: experiences of truth in daily life, the practice of Christian theology, divine revelation, and even the divine being itself all exhibit this eschatological-temporal character.

Lastly, in this account of Jüngel's alethiology, I periodically make explicit some of the philosophical dialogue partners that shape Jüngel's own account. I emphasize the importance of philosophical phenomenology, and particularly Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, participated in a mutually critical, but also fruitful dialogue with the hermeneutical tradition in theology (Rudolf Bultmann, Gerhard Ebeling, and Ernst Fuchs). Jüngel inherited this dialogue and was a philosophically sophisticated participant in it.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, Jüngel's long dialogue with currents in philosophy does not compromise his robust sense of theology's independence and uniqueness over against other humanistic disciplines. Philosophical conceptualities are often subjected to radical theological refinement before being put to dogmatic use. Nevertheless, these voices in general, and Heidegger in particular, were significant influences on Jüngel and

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<sup>7</sup> Jüngel's first published work was not 1965's *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, a book of Barth-interpretation, but rather 1961's "Der Schritt zurück," an argument about theological appropriations of Heidegger. See Eberhard Jüngel, "Der Schritt zurück: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Heidegger-Deutung Heinrich Otts," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 58, no. 1 (1961): 104–22.

his tradition. Clarifying the critical dialogue between them does much to clarify in turn the nature of Jüngel's alethiology.

## B. Theology and contemporary historical consciousness

This leads to another reason to clarify the philosophical pedigree of Jüngel's account of truth: it clarifies Jüngel's relation to ongoing debates in Christian theology. Here two specific examples immediately suggest themselves. One is contemporary debates in theological and philosophical alethiology, epistemology, and ontology. As we will see, Jüngel's alethiology constitutes a double critique: first of alethiologies that rely on a broadly Augustinian-Thomist metaphysic for their background, and second of the distinctively modern metaphysic stemming from Descartes and Kant.<sup>8</sup> This places Jüngel among continuing debates about truth within Christianity, and the relation of these claims to theological and philosophical ontology. He is also among an eclectic group of Christian and non-Christian thinkers who attempt to respond to, rather than fundamentally dispute, the post-Heideggerian alethiological landscape.<sup>9</sup> Those who think Heidegger and other phenomenological and continental thinkers offer important dialogue partners for Christian thought, as well as those who render more critical judgments about this philosophical

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<sup>8</sup> The terms 'metaphysic' and 'metaphysical,' much like the term 'historical,' are slippery, and much fraught in contemporary discussion. In what follows I try to be as clear as possible about how I use the term, and how Jüngel uses it. In this sentence, I intend to use the term purely descriptively. By contrast, as we shall see, when Jüngel uses the term he usually uses it pejoratively, in senses I will specify.

<sup>9</sup> Such a response need not entail a complete acceptance of Heideggerian or phenomenological claims. For a helpful gloss on some responses to the phenomenological milieu within philosophical theology as either "diastatic" or "diathetic," see Judith Wolfe, "Eschatological Being," (conference paper, New Trinitarian Ontologies Conference, Cambridge, UK, September 2019). Wolfe lists among figures in the latter camp, who reject an attempt "to accommodate an openness to the transcendent in human structures of intentionality," Jean-Luc Marion, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Yves Lacoste (2). (For Jüngel's own critical engagement with Levinas, which amidst crucial differences admits "in many particular points of analysis and definitions, our own reflections are very close to those of Levinas," see *Essays* 2:91–9.) A similar attempt to respond to Heidegger played out in a different way can be found in e.g. Kevin W. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2011). For contrasting accounts that emphasize the relation between ordinary practices of making and accepting truth-claims and their necessary background in more traditional Christian ontologies, see John Milbank, and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York, NY: Routledge 2000). See also Michael Slater, "Theology, Metaphysics, and Realism About Truth," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 244–67.

orientation, can benefit from seeing in detail how this influence on Jüngel (and the hermeneutical tradition in theology more generally) plays out.

This work's focus on truth and history will also contribute to the continuing evaluation of 'historicizing' trends in contemporary Trinitarian theology. These can be found in such otherwise disparate figures as Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert Jenson.<sup>10</sup> Such historicizing moves can also be at least arguably found in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth.<sup>11</sup> Figures like these span a variety of ecclesial locations and differ greatly on particular theological issues, but the perceived common thread is an account of divine being as processive, as instantiating a kind of temporal movement or history that stands athwart a more traditional emphasis on divine timelessness. Another, more controverted, similarity is a shared affinity for Hegel's philosophy, either implicit or explicit. On this point, just like his alethiology, Jüngel offers one specific account, with its own unique strengths and weaknesses, that is nevertheless part of a larger family. Its members share broad resemblances and distinct idiosyncracies. If we cannot lazily dismiss them by dumping them all in the same bucket, neither can we ignore the similarities. In the course of inquiry, we will gain a clearer sense of the ways Jüngel's alethiology informs his theology proper. I take it this clarity is worthwhile whether or not we endorse his Trinitarian claims.

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<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson et al. (New York, NY: Harper & Row 1972). Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991). For a brief investigation of Jenson's relationship to Hegel, see my "Jenson, Hegel, and the Spirit of Recognition," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no. 3 (2019): 314–35. For critical overviews of these and other figures as instancing a problematic debt to Hegel, a problematic account of the relationship between eternity and time, or both, see e.g. Ayres, *Nicea and its Legacy*, 384–414. George Hunsinger, "Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: A Review Essay," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 161–200. See also Hunsinger's "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity, and some Protestant Doctrines After Barth," Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For both Barth and von Balthasar, the nature and extent of Hegel's influence is a subject of debate. For an account that emphasizes Balthasar's debt to Hegel, see Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005). For an account that emphasizes Balthasar's distance from, and criticism of, Hegel, see Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity. Volume 1: Hegel* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, 2014). For accounts of the Barth-Hegel relationship, see for example Adam Eitel, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Karl Barth and the Historicization of God's Being," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 1 (2008): 36–53. Nicholas Adams, "Barth and Hegel," unpublished manuscript available on academia.edu. In addition, recent debates about Trinity and election in Barth have foregrounded divergent readings of his doctrine of God and the extent to which it is 'historicized' in something like this way. For an introduction, see Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

In a work like this it is impossible to incorporate a full-scale evaluation of seminal figures like Hegel and Heidegger. Still less can we evaluate Jüngel's dialogue with other philosophical figures: the significant influence of figures like F.W.J. Schelling, or Soren Kierkegaard, must also be laid aside here. My modest hope in this volume is simply to better specify the nature and extent of Jüngel's dialogue with, or appropriation of, a few important philosophical influences, and thus to make a contribution for more informed debate regarding the appropriation of certain kinds of philosophy by Christian theology.

### C. Jüngel's historical account of truth

I have already introduced the main thesis of this work: Jüngel has an historical account of truth. I gloss this claim by also referring to Jüngel's 'eschatological historicism'; I conceive of the two claims as basically synonymous. One of the main tasks ahead of us in this work is adequately defining the slippery terms 'historical' and 'historicist.' By referring to Jüngel's account of truth as 'historical,' I mean this. Truth for Jüngel is temporal: it takes place *in* time, simultaneously entering into and interrupting the course of ordinary temporal development. And it takes place *as* time, an event that recapitulates the historical speaking of the divine word in Jesus. In advancing this account of truth, Jüngel critiques and stands in opposition to views that take truth to be primarily atemporal, abstract, and propositional; unfolding exactly what this view entails is an important part of chapters one and two. Jüngel understands truth to be first and foremost temporal, concrete, and trans-propositional.

The claim that Jüngel's understanding of truth is 'historical' becomes clearer if we contrast his account of truth with others. We will briefly note three such accounts. We can begin with Jüngel's 1982 essay "Anthropomorphism," in which he offers a fascinating sketch of an 'ahistorical' account of truth that clashes with his own 'historical one.' The target of his critique is philosopher Baruch Spinoza, particularly his understanding of truth in relation to biblical hermeneutics as found in the *Tractatus*.<sup>12</sup> Fleshing out the reasons why Jüngel finds this hermeneutic inadequate help fill in a bit more clearly, at this early point, the features Jüngel is trying to avoid and reject in his own alternative account of truth. Jüngel begins by noting that Spinoza affirms the Reformational axioms that Scripture proves its own divinity, and that Scripture is self-interpreting (75). But unlike

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<sup>12</sup> Essays 1:74–87; TE 3 110–31. I will rely here on Jüngel's presentation of Spinoza's views, and set aside whatever concerns might be raised about the veracity of his critique. My interest is in making Jüngel's views clearer by fleshing out the views he rejects, whether or not they might be accurately ascribed to Spinoza. The same applies for my engagements with Troeltsch and Pannenberg below.

the Reformers, what makes Scripture divine for Spinoza is not its function in communicating the gospel or attesting to Jesus Christ, but “the fact that Scripture teaches true moral precepts.” “The agreement between Scripture and those moral truths knowable by reason alone should provide the divinity of Scripture.” As Jüngel notes, “the *meaning* of Scripture is to be drawn from Scripture alone. But Scripture may not determine the *truth*”: the responsibility for that falls to reason (75). In this sense “Scripture is largely irrelevant to truth for Spinoza” (80).

As the above suggests, Spinoza firmly rejects any understanding of biblical interpretation that requires special divine inspiration to be successful: “The hermeneutical method of biblical exegesis which Spinoza postulates in the *Treatise* is only one example of general scientific procedure, as Spinoza himself indicates in his remark that this method requires no light other than that of ‘natural reason’” (77). But Spinoza has not read Dilthey (naturally enough, having lived a few centuries before him): there is for him no distinction between ‘explaining’ and ‘understanding,’ between the method of interpretation appropriate to “historical being” and that appropriate to the “natural order.”<sup>13</sup> We use the same method to interpret the protozoa on our microscope as we do Caesar crossing the Rubicon. But the two types of event are not on an equal footing. Both in terms of the order of investigation as well as the order of being, the general has priority over the particular. In investigating Scripture the interpreter adopts a method “of comparison, to deduce and infer that which is obscure from that which is known or presupposed to be known” (80). We know a great many things by the light of natural reason and judge the contents of Scripture by those more general and basic presuppositions. And similarly, we scrutinize the particular narratives and teachings of Scripture (e.g., about Christ) in light of their more general “basis or foundation....namely, the existence of the one almighty God, who alone is to be worshipped” (81).

The upshot of this movement from the general to the particular is that the prophet or apostle turns out to be a lesser kind of philosopher. “Prophets *interpret* revelation in such a way that they are believed on the basis of authority, while philosophers *explain* revelation in such a way that it can be known with the same certainty with which it was previously known by them” (81). Special revelation depicts the nature and aims of God “in the form of words or images” that are accommodated to the mode of their hearer. This makes it a “deficient mode of revelation with regard to the transmission of [its] cognitive value” (82–3). By contrast, natural revelation “is in the fullest sense revelation of God” because it is not accommodated “to the individual

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<sup>13</sup> See Essays 1:78. For Dilthey’s famous distinction, see Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing 1991), 51–7.

limitations of the knower.” For Spinoza, since humanity is created by God, it “objectively contains the nature of God within itself,” and so “is able to form concepts which teach the nature of things and right conduct in life” (83). This higher, superior knowledge of God “does not happen through signs, words, and images,” but through a mode of knowing that “best corresponds to the nature of the mind” – which means a certain “mathematical knowledge” of God and creation.

The result of these hermeneutical commitments is significant. If we interpret Scripture by beginning with what is prior, i.e. most fundamental epistemologically and ontologically, and what is prior is more general and more universally applicable, and so less dependent upon history and cultural context, it is quite natural to conclude that God, as the creator of the universe and sum of all truths, is outside of time. Indeed, Spinoza’s frequent comparisons between biblical hermeneutic and indeed geometry are quite telling: “part of the intention of the historical-critical method is to keep God free from all historical determinateness as a being known without the medium of human language” (86). The square root of 16 is always four, and has always been so, and is so in all cultures and contexts; Spinoza’s aim is getting this kind of knowledge out of Scripture and jettisoning the rest. But the result of these hermeneutical commitments is a theological *coup de grace*: “*the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture is fundamentally a method which serves the prevailing interest in the unhistoricality [ungeschichtlichkeit] of God*” (86, italics original). For Spinoza, we must keep God well-insulated from history: we must abjure from any anthropomorphism. There will be no talk of change in God, or of God possessing an intellect or will, or acting for the sake of ends. And we certainly may not speak of God taking on human nature in the incarnation, which Spinoza decries as just as absurd as saying that a circle takes on the nature of a square.

This brief engagement with Spinoza provides a telling and helpful example of what Jüngel is trying to avoid in his own account of truth. In a way his aim is to turn Spinoza upside-down: if Spinoza aimed to test and evaluate the scriptural narratives by the light of natural reason, thus rendering the particular histories narrated there of little moment, Jüngel aims to make scriptural narrative – centered upon the lived history of Jesus Christ – his ontological and epistemological starting point. That God is truth is not abstractable from the lived history of Jesus Christ; the propositional discourse of theologians is always dependent on a prior temporal act of God in revelation; even the extremely abstract and impersonal idiom of logicians or natural scientists is dependent for Jüngel upon a prior ‘address’ or ‘self-interpretation’ of being in time. In subsequent chapters we will flesh out the nature and inter-connections of these claims.

So Jüngel rejects wholeheartedly the account of truth he finds in Spinoza because he regards it as fundamentally inimical to the ‘Geschichtlichkeit’ of

truth. But at this point an important objection to my thesis arises. This objection might be couched like this: to speak of Jüngel as having a ‘historical’ account of truth, over against an ‘ahistorical’ one, is at best misleading, and at worst simply false. Beginning with his first book *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, Jüngel strives to carry on the revolution in theological epistemology inaugurated by dialectical theology. An essential commitment of this epistemology, and its rejection of natural theology, is the denial that any factor on the side of the human hearer of the Word of God makes possible the hearing of that word. This includes human history: as Barth famously affirmed (and as Jüngel himself re-affirmed [GMW 348–9]), revelation is not a predicate of history; history is rather a predicate of revelation. Thus whatever the dynamism or temporality of his understanding of truth, to describe it as ‘historical’ or ‘historicist’ situates Jüngel in close proximity to views he in fact rejects.

This objection is important, not because it identifies a weakness in my argument, but because it further clarifies my thesis. It is indeed always axiomatic for Jüngel that God becomes object only inasmuch as God remains subject. History, indeed, is a predicate of revelation and not vice-versa: absent the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, historical data in itself remains a mere cipher, incapable of attesting to God’s presence in history. This is the concern to which the modifier ‘*eschatological* historicism’ is designed to respond. An instructive contrast here is the kind of theological historicism we see in a pre-dialectical thinker like Ernst Troeltsch. Troeltsch shares Jüngel’s strong emphasis on history, but cannot conceive of divine revelation as a radical eschatological *novum* because of his strong emphasis on the principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation.<sup>14</sup> For Jüngel, revelation is such a *novum*: important senses, revelation interrupts human history, shatters our sense of the future as ‘just more of the same’ by allowing that which is truly eschatologically new to enter in.<sup>15</sup>

Jüngel not only rejects the kind of historicism found in Troeltsch, but he also firmly repudiates the understanding of truth and history found in a post-dialectical figure with whom he has a great deal more in common, Wolfhart Pannenberg. Jüngel and Pannenberg kept up a critical dialogue throughout their careers, culminating in an exchange of articles after the publication of the first volume of Pannenberg’s system.<sup>16</sup> A full presentation of the fascinating

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<sup>14</sup> These three principles are enunciated in Troeltsch’s essay “On Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” in *Religion in History*, trans. Adams et al. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress 1997). See also Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 56–65. Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 66–7, 78–81.

<sup>15</sup> See “The Emergence of the New,” in *Essays* 2:35–58.

<sup>16</sup> See Eberhard Jüngel, “‘Nihil Divinitatis, Ubi Non Fides’: Ist christliche Dogmatik in rein theoretischer Perspektive möglich? Bemerkungen zu einem theologischen Entwurf von



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