

R. David Nelson, *The Interruptive Word: Eberhard Jüngel on the Sacramental Structure of God's Relation to the World*. London and New York: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2013, 256pp. £65.00 / \$120.00

One of the great insights of Rudolph Bultmann into Christian origins was that 'the proclaimer became the proclaimed' when 'Christ arose into the *kerygma*', that is, when 'faith overcame the scandal of the cross' by the announcement, 'He is not here' (Mk 16:6, truncated). This announcement, in scandal-overcoming faith that took the empty tomb as indicating the divine deed of the resurrection of the One who had been laid there, articulates the new 'eschatological' possibility not available within the existing situation of humanity. It thus discloses God as the One who has possibilities beyond the creature and summons accordingly the creature's trust in venturing a new future open to God's future as now disclosed. The announcement already now puts the auditor into a state of 'crisis' before God, as before the *eschaton* of judgement, as it requires the decision of faith or unbelief. In the process, it exposes the auditor's existence as a false striving after worldly security yet at the same time mercifully opens up faith's new possibility of cruciform love in the world. The original and originating Christian 'announcement' understood in this way allows pre-modern mythological accoutrements to be set aside as false stumbling-blocks in the way of the authentic decision of faith demanded and enabled by the *kerygma*, so that God's interruptive address continues in contemporaneous preaching. Preaching in turn is authentically Christian in precipitating and sustaining this existential transformation in human self-understanding.

Preaching could do a lot worse. Often it does. It often fails, that is to say, to interrupt the auditor's habituated being in the world in the way, as R. David Nelson puts it at the heart of his excellent study, of that 'interruptive figure who shattered the life-continuities of his first-century Palestinian contemporaries through his public proclamation and corresponding behavior' (pp. 87–8). Yet just affirmation of *Jesus* as the One crucified and raised and so present to interrupt in preaching exposes the Achilles Heel of Bultmann's program, as his disciple, Ernst Käsemann first saw (p. 89). Moreover, according to Nelson, the 'dilemma' reflected here, that the Jesus of history *is* the Christ of faith, 'locates' Jüngel's entire theological project (pp. 87–111).

The dilemma is this: Bultmann's interpretation of resurrection faith as 'overcoming the scandal of the cross' (rather than establishing the scandal) evacuated the body of Jesus of saving significance and in turn instrumentalized both his body and the body of the *kerygma*'s auditor by regarding the body as nothing but the site of existential decision. The body thus ceased being the inalienable bearer of a concrete way of being in the world through time. The happenstance on the third day of the loss of the corpse ('He is not here') at most precipitated the Easter decision of faith, which in principle could also have been pronounced over the discovery of the corpse (that is, in the equivalent announcement, 'This lifeless body is not really He'). Consequently, the life Jesus lived as his body that brought him to Jerusalem as

the very touch of God's approaching reign, and as such to betrayal and denial and rejection and death by crucifixion, also becomes devoid of theological significance. It survives only as Bultmann's minimalist *das Dass*, as presupposition, as the mere fact of Jesus' coming – in that the voice of God needs a human voicebox to address us.

Only what (little) can be recovered of Jesus' 'proclamation' might have (equally small) relevance here as a kind of precedent for the contemporaneous proclamation of the decision of faith. This would be Jesus as 'subject who proclaims', then, not as 'object of belief', thus Jesus who sounds again with the summons to faith, not Jesus offering his body 'given for you'. In this way, consequently, not only the historical body of Jesus, but also both his sacramental body in the Eucharist and the earthly body of his eucharistic people, are evacuated of saving significance. *All* that matters is the punctiliar interruption, like the appearance of Christ to Saul on the road to Damascus, a bolt from out of a blue sky. The price paid by Bultmann's single-minded purification of the kerygma to its disruptive function was to have constructed a sophisticated docetism in which Christ only appears to have been human, his body in every respect emptied of meaning to become no more than an occasion for spirits to meet.

While the trinitarian theology of Eberhard Jüngel is rightly discussed today in terms of its interesting and complex relation to the theology of Karl Barth, if R. David Nelson is right even Jüngel's relation to Barth might best be understood along the foregoing lines. Nelson shows how Jüngel cut his theological teeth in the post-Bultmannian school of the New Hermeneutics of Ebeling and Fuchs. The advance here over Bultmann was the realization that there is no pre-linguistic realm of existential authenticity that can serve as a philosophical foundation for the interpretation of New Testament mythology, as Bultmann assumed. Rather, existential authenticity is variously constituted in language, including then 'myth', that is, the narrative of the New Testament. Thus the critique stemming from Barth of Bultmann's neo-docetism, that it de-narrativizes Jesus Christ and reduces him to the mere occasion of a curiously timeless announcement, provided for a recasting of Bultmann's theological legacy. Accordingly, Barth's 'analogy of faith' becomes in Jüngel the 'analogy of advent'; this new synthesis reflects *both* Barth's insistence that theology is in the first place about the narrated God *and* Bultmann's eschatological key to the New Testament with its characteristic emphases on preaching, not as a 'witness' exterior to the event attested, but as the very 'event' of the interruptive *coming* (advent) of God *as* language, concretely, as parable, as the 'metaphor', crucified Christ.

The 'advent of God' in proclamation, in distinction from Barth's witness of faith, reflects the closer yet all the same paradoxical (i.e. 'Lutheran', pp. 2–7) identification of proclaimer and proclaimed; this event of identification in advent accounts for Jüngel's repeated invocation of the 'sacramental structure' of God's relation to the world (pp. 11–58). In human preaching about Christ, Christ becomes present (paradoxically, once again, as 'absent', p. 23, i.e. as 're-presented' by the human preacher or liturgical leader, p. 169), not merely attested as Someone other

than and exterior to the human witness. Even more interesting, if Nelson is right, than this reworking of Barth in accord with Bultmann's 'eschatological' paradox of the Already's presence in the Not Yet, is that it has slowly led Jüngel in the direction of theological recovery of the saving significance of the body: the body which was Jesus of Nazareth, the body which as raised can become present in the eucharistic meal, the body which consumed transforms its consumers into itself, the body of Christ.

In the later thinking of Jüngel, 'the word-event not only represents "but also *presents* the represented event in such a way that it can be received in faith"'. The linguistic sign, then, is unified with the thing signified ' "in the sacramental action, in which a *verbum* is joined by a *signum*" ' (p. 160) so that faith is unified with its object, that is, the believer is unified with Jesus Christ (*unio cum Christo*) in his body to become his body. If this interpretation holds, Nelson has thus shown how haltingly, to be sure, but inexorably Jüngel's initial decision against docetism leads him towards the teaching of Luther (pp. 188, 195) on

the one sacramental reality. The words are the first thing, for without the words the cup and the bread would be nothing. Further, without bread and cup, the body and blood of Christ would not be there. Without the body and blood of Christ, the New Testament would not be there. Without the new testament, forgiveness of sins would not be there. Without forgiveness of sins, life and salvation would not be there . . . (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 37, p. 338, emphasis added)

Being *there*, of course, is being *body*.

Nelson conceptualizes 'the body' as 'continuity through time' in distinction from the momentary interruption of life-continuities by the kerygma. He thus sees Jüngel moving towards a view of interruption that reorganizes continuity through time so that this intended reorganization is what characterizes the sacramental structure of God's relation to the world, not interruption alone. That evolution would likewise better correspond to Luther's 'God kills in order to make alive' (pp. 214, 216). Thus, while the earlier Jüngel consistently wrote of (the preached) Jesus Christ as the 'one sacrament of God' in order to underscore the interruptive character of the Word, Nelson discovers in Jüngel's more recent writings something approximating Luther's own 'one sacramental reality', that is, the treatment of the Lord's Supper and baptism as sacraments, even of the church as the sacramental sign of Jesus Christ in the world (pp. 206–30).

Although tensions and even anomalies in Jüngel's view remain, Nelson detects a position that allows both 'representation and presentation'. He writes judiciously in conclusion that although 'Jüngel evidently does not intend for the category of interruption to posit an absolute hiatus between God and the world, nor between the saving word and the continuity of life' (p. 236), he 'fails to clearly expound the character of the relation between the interrupting word and the ordinary discourse of the interrupted hearer' (p. 237). In the process of executing this lucid analysis of a writer who can be oppressively obscure, Nelson penetrates to an underlying problem of Western theology inherited from Augustine, the distinction between the sign and

the thing signified (pp. 61–76). The solution to the dualism, if it can be called that, by Bultmann and the New Hermeneutics was to evacuate theological language of referentiality. In the language of promise, the thing signified gives itself as subject that does not become an object in the world. But the drift of Jüngel's thinking that Nelson has exposed seems to indicate a thing signified presenting itself *as* its sign, *in, with and under* its representation. Fully to unpack that alternative, however, would require moving beyond 'Word alone' theology to a trinitarian account with a pneumatology adequate (p. 139) to the sacramental task of unifying the sign and the thing signified.

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Scott R. Swain, *God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 258pp. £18.00 / \$30.00

A distant descendant of its 'ancestor dissertation' written under Kevin Vanhoozer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (p. 7), Scott Swain's *God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology* blends thoughtful engagement of a contemporary theological figure with retrieval of Catholic trinitarian teaching for the sake of constructive theology. The *quaestio*, as Swain puts it, that guides the book 'concerns the relationship between God's being and God's self-determination, between the Trinity and election, between God's unfailing character and God's unfolding covenant that reaches its climax in Jesus Christ' (p. 14). This matter has come to the fore particularly in theological discussion 'after Barth', and Swain undertakes a close reading of one major (albeit neglected) voice in this discussion en route to offering his own account of God 'according to the gospel' (p. 16).

The second chapter of the book navigates Barth's development of the doctrine of the Trinity in connection with his understanding of election as God's 'evangelical self-determination'. With an eye to the recent debates about the implications of election for the being of God, Swain comments that, while Barth is said to have enjoyed a 'bit of Hegeling', a number of his theological heirs extend his 'historicizing agenda' and its 'concomitant metaphysical revisionism' (pp. 62–3). This then segues to an introduction to Jenson's theology as a 'species of post-Barthian evangelical historicism' oriented to God's establishment of his own being via 'eschatological consummation' (pp. 63–4).

Part 1 (chapters 3–5) of the body of the volume is chiefly descriptive, outlining Jenson's historicist rendition of God. Jenson does not provide a trans-historical directory of the traditional divine attributes in his *Systematic Theology* but rather traces God's action in history as the pathway to naming and knowing God in Christian theology. Therefore, in chapters 3 and 4 Swain sketches Jenson's claim that