

*Theological Essays II.* By Eberhard Jüngel. Edited by J.B. Webster. Translated by J.B. Webster and Arnold Neufeldt-Fast. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995. xxiv + 272 pp. \$47.95 (cloth).

This book comprises the second collection of Jüngel's translated essays published under the editorship of John Webster. It is devoted almost entirely to articles and addresses from the 1980s which in the original German are available in *Wertlose Wahrheit* (Munich, 1990). As was the case with the first volume, Webster has provided a judicious selection, and the English rendering is eminently readable. Transforming Jüngel's extremely allusive (and elusive) German into smooth and elegant English is not without its risks; perhaps inevitably, subtle nuances are occasionally lost. Nevertheless, the benefits of this valuable collection more than justify the attempt. The result is a superb overview of Jüngel's recent theological writing, and a good introduction to his mature thought for those put off by his rather intimidating monographs.

After a brief and lucid introduction by Webster, the collection opens with a pithy sketch by Jüngel of his theological concerns, "'My Theology'—A Short Summary." This modest but fascinating self-delineation touches on almost all the characteristic themes evident throughout the rest of the collection: the demand for and limits of reason in theology, the revisionary doctrine of a God freed from axiomatic absoluteness, the reevaluation of cherished philosophical categories in the light of revelation (e.g. the putative superiority of actuality over possibility, or the relation of narrative and addressing speech to the language of concept and assertion), the anthropological distinction of person and work, and the interpretive application of the doctrine of justification. Even this enumeration of issues only hints at the varied themes of the ten essays which follow, the scope of which should be at least briefly indicated.

The first three essays following Jüngel's overview deal in turn with the relation of theology to philosophy (via a reading of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*), the complex relationship in scriptural tradition and in temporal reality between the past and the possibilities which emerge from the future, and the theological interpretation of aesthetics in light of the cross. The remaining seven pieces center on more properly dogmatic concerns. There is a lengthy and important essay on the theological importance of the historical Jesus, followed by a treatment of a knotty theme which Jüngel has repeatedly wrestled with: the hiddenness of God and the problem of suffering. The next two pieces deal with the salvific significance of Jesus' passion and death, a theme the importance of which Jüngel seeks to reestablish given the current one-sided emphasis on Jesus as a political or moral exemplar. Finally, the last three essays are devoted to exploring the anthropological and

ethical implications of the doctrine of justification (interpreted, not surprisingly, in a very Lutheran manner). These last works in particular illustrate that concern for applying theological insights to contemporary European cultural and political questions which has strongly marked Jüngel's most recent writing.

These eleven essays exemplify the typical strengths and weaknesses of Jüngel's distinguished body of work. Critical assessment must take place on the level of the individual pieces, but on the whole it should be pointed out that they seem to represent a kind of retrenchment in Jüngel's thinking. Save for the essay on aesthetics, the emphasis here is largely on the fine-tuning and application of themes already explored more vigorously in earlier works. The stylistic simplicity and maturity of these later essays is certainly welcome, but even so one misses the sense of innovation which permeates his earlier, often aggressively complex articles. Nonetheless, for its many strengths this book can only be heartily recommended.

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*The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong.* By William C. Placher. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996. 320 pp. \$20.00 (paper).

A significant, perhaps now dominant, consensus has developed: the theological practice of the past is a failure. One need but flip through a book catalogue from the usual denominational presses. There, one finds countless "revisionings," "reconstructions" and "retrievals." This assumption of failure and the search for a new beginning cuts across "liberal" and "conservative" differences. Our theology is too experiential—or not experiential enough. Our liturgy is too distant and hierarchical—or too banal and leveling. Our images of God are too oppressive—or too conveniently permissive. Something is very wrong with our inherited patterns of thinking about, talking about and praying to God. A decisively new approach is needed. Thus reads a great deal of contemporary theology.

William Placher has entered into the fray of this search for a new beginning in other writings (see *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology and Scripture*, Louisville, 1994). There, he engages in a pattern of argument