BOOK REVIEWS

Eberhard Juengel An Introduction to his Theology. By J. B. Webster. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. viii + 182 pp. n.p.

It belongs, no doubt, to the increasing interest in and significance of the work of Eberhard Juengel that doctoral dissertations and books about him should begin to appear on the shelves. As far as I am aware, this one by J. B. Webster is the first in English, and is significant just for that fact. From the credits one gathers that Webster did doctoral work and presumably a dissertation on Juengel at the University of Cambridge and that this book is built upon, though different from, that work. Webster's stated aim is "to provide a reliable guide to Juengel's work for English readers, and to offer some initial evaluation of its main features."

In the main the book succeeds rather well for such a short treatment. Especially helpful for non-German readers, I expect, are the indications of Juengel's theological lineage in Ernst Fuchs and, of course, the close involvement with the problematic bequeathed by Karl Barth. The exposition of Juengel's literary output follows roughly chronological lines, beginning with the doctoral dissertation written under Fuchs, *Paulus und Jesus*, and proceeding through works better known to English readers through translation, such as *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, and devoting considerable attention to *God the Mystery of the World*. Throughout, Webster seeks to set Juengel's major works in the context of his "development" through liberal reference to significant essays and reviews. Not being a "Juengel Kenner" of any extension or depth, I found this approach quite enlightening. The notes and the exhaustive bibliography are very helpful in introducing Juengel's work and emerging critical discussion about it.

Webster's exposition of Juengel is generally useful and should encourage the reader to enter Juengel's difficult and often perplexing but highly rewarding theological world. I shall not attempt

here to condense Webster's already compact treatment. Perhaps more to the point might be some general comments about Webster's critical observations. A rather constant criticism throughout is more or less formal: Juengel's fondness for abstraction and refusal to give examples which would help the reader. Webster is right about that, of course. Juengel explicitly refuses to popularize. Is there something more in that than simple attention to the exactitute of the systematic task? Webster does not ask that question, but one wonders. Be that as it may, Webster's more substantive criticisms seem to be mostly those of the sort one might expect of an English theologian questioning a German Lutheran who has been heavily influenced by Barth. Webster worries about what he calls Juengel's "monist" intellectual manner, the tendency to adhere very closely to one intellectual strategy to the exclusion of others and thus not to give sufficient attention to the "sheer complexity of what is the case"(5). Perhaps there is some justice to this, but at the same time the theological world is being distracted to endless ennui and superficiality by the prophets of diversity. Perhaps we need thinkers who probe the depths of at least one good thing and make a case for it.

There are many more detailed critical questions raised about Juengel's work which the reader will find provoking. In general they seem to be mostly of the sort an "ontologist" would raise of a "word-event theologian." No doubt this is a theological problematic which still needs a good deal of working over. Yet I wonder whether Webster does not invest too much stock in a systematic theology done for its own sake. I have wondered too whether Juengel himself is not enticed too much by that—so to be drawn into the world of theological abstractions. It would seem to me to be the point of a word-event theology that it should drive to a proclamation which is itself the "event," the "solution" to the systematic problem. I think Juengel's theology strains in that direction, but tends often to depend too much on itself. Now the problem with criticisms like those of Webster who, from this book at least does not seem to appreciate the nature of the move from systematics to proclamation, is that if heeded they would likely only entice Juengel's theology more in the wrong direction.

Perhaps this is to say that even for all its sympathetic treatment and its genuine usefulness, I am not entirely confident that Webster grasps what is going on in a theology like Juengel's. The

North Sea is still a broad and most treacherous expanse to cross in the theological world. Perhaps a tip-off to that comes in a remark in the conclusion: "Above all, Juengel's theology needs to devote more space to exploring the nature of human agency" (137). The remark demonstrates both something about what Webster expects theology to accomplish and about his theological sympathies. At least since the days of that ancient Briton Pelagius, theologians have been trying to defend human agency from the thunder of the Almighty. The job never seems to get done. Is Juengel's theology too to be enlisted in that vain endeavor so we can all heave a sigh of relief that once again we are afforded at least temporary protection by so great a theologian? I hope not. Juengel's theology, like any real and proper theology, does not need to go that way. What is needed is a more resolute grasping of the face that theology drives to and is therefore limited by the proclamation through which alone human agents are set free before almighty God.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Life in Pictures. Eds. Eberhard Bethge, Renate Bethge, and Christian Gremmels. Tr. John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986. $34.95.

This book contains a lively narrative account of the life of a Christian theologian and martyr who stands at a critical juncture in the history of the Christian Church. Those who do not know the details of the Bonhoeffer biography will be taken along a remarkable journey. They will become acquainted with Dietrich's family—highly cultured, esteemed and educated—that followed a generation-long tradition of critical citizenship set to the highest moral standards. They will follow Dietrich through childhood, student days, years of untiring dedication to the international ecumenical movement, and, amidst the darkening clouds of the Nazi regime, they will see him arising as a leader of the Confessing Church and of the underground resistance to Hitler. Finally, they will trace the unsuccessful attempts on Hitler's life, and the arrest of the key members of the resistance group, culminating in the cruel mockery of "trials" and executions of Dietrich and a host of his friends and family members.