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Review: The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology

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The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology. By Eberhard Jüngel. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988, 109 pp., \$9.95.

In the preface translator R. Harrisville makes two significant points about Jüngel: (1) His German is almost untranslatable; (2) Jüngel is "one of the few clear voices within contemporary theological discussion, a discussion which speaks to everything and everyone!" As one who has read and reviewed Jüngel's earlier tome, *God as the Mystery of the World*, I am largely in agreement with both points. While Jüngel's works are far more difficult to translate than to read in translation, he effectively engages and critiques the varied movements of our time.

In relatively brief compass Jüngel clearly intends to engage Luther in discussion in order to clarify critical aspects of his thought. Through that process Jüngel reinserts Luther's thought into theological discussion as a spur and corrective. He shows how Luther, in being considered no longer relevant to the modern theological task, has been both misunderstood and prematurely set aside. The third and final chapter, itself about half of the book, is a careful analysis of Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*, by means of which Jüngel sets forth the case for Luther's thought in contemporary theology.

When reviewing books I prefer to draw together a final analysis by beginning with the positive points, but in this case I begin negatively. Because of Jüngel's "arrogant" and almost untranslatable German, some may find the thought of the first two chapters hard to follow if they are not accustomed to Jüngel's use of theological paradox. He seems to deny the deity of Christ or, putting the issue in Nicene terms, the *homoousion* of Christ with the Father, though that is not fully clear. Positively, however, the book is not only a useful (if difficult) introduction to Jüngel's thought but also a stimulating and usually convincing presentation of Luther and of Luther's potential role in current theological discussions. As such it is to be recommended.

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A Life of John Calvin. By Alister E. McGrath. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, 332 pp., \$29.95.

Alister McGrath has rapidly been establishing a reputation as one of the world's leading Reformation scholars by publishing several important monographs since 1985. He has produced an impressive quantity of literature, the quality of which is outstanding. His most recent effort is a biography of Calvin, which immediately makes one wonder if yet another life of Calvin is necessary especially after W. Bouwsma's groundbreaking sixteenth-century portrait of the Genevan Reformer was published in 1988. Yet McGrath has composed a substantial contribution to the recent literature on Calvin. His work could prove to be McGrath's best effort to date.

Lucidly written and well documented, the book covers more ground than just a biographical sketch of Calvin's life. It is divided into two sections. The first is properly called a biography of Calvin, while the second half details Calvin's theology with special reference to the *Institutes* and also covers important topics such as the development and internationalization of Calvinism, the role of Geneva as a missionary center for France, and the relationship between Calvinism and capitalism with special reference to the Weber thesis.

The author also sets the stage for the development of the Reformed movement with an analysis of the origins of humanism in Paris and the unique reasons for the



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