

Editorial

Mark Elliott

I write this on a warm summer's evening looking out on Heidelberg (I am here on research leave.) Not far away, the streams of tourists remind the academic of the wide-world and its seeming indifference to things like theology. But for one whose stay in Heidelberg is at one level to get that vital 'second book' written, a sort of cut-price *Habilitation*, it still seems important to immerse oneself to some extent in the culture (language included!). Because I have already learned so much! I think this would have happened whether I'd been in Paris or Rome or Krakow, although I would obviously have learned other things. I could have learned more, if my linguistic, cultural and personal channels had been more open.

The stay here has made me think of the impoverishment of theology in Britain due to 'our' simple inability or reluctance to read or listen in other languages, and thus to voices which do not simply follow the assumptions of long traditions of theology there. I am also reminded of German insularity (although compensated for in many other modes of 'openness') and that insularity is a universal human failing which confuses belonging with exclusion of other voices. I was at the International SBL meeting in Berlin recently and experienced the interesting phenomenon that those with the most to say and the most enthusiasm and seriousness about saying it were often the 'liberal' Americans (from Claremont and Harvard for example) wanting to ask whether the bible and philosophy could be united, and the at least apparently more pious Europeans (often Scandinavian and Swiss) trying to get more out of their bibles by asking questions about metaphor and meaning. Of course the Brits, caught up in borrowing from cultural studies and critical theory seemed the most intellectually bankrupt of them all, although those Germans who glory in the achievements of Harnack rather than in paying attention to the texts came in a close second.

This stay here has also led me to think of the lack in our evangelical theological movement of

a true self-belief or joy in belonging to a 'tradition' (if I can use that term) that has so much going for it: bible reading, personal spirituality, a strong emphasis on the communal church, social and political involvement, for instance. A belief in God's faithfulness and Christ's compassion and the Holy Spirit's enabling are an antidote both to religious false modesty and to insensitive religious fanaticism. I would like to see this journal play a part not just as a repository for lost articles, but as a place of conversation and debate – and to this effect would like to commission short debate-like pieces on certain subjects within the pages of the journal. (The *Scottish Journal of Theology* has done this quite successfully for a few years now.) I stop short of suggesting a letters page in a twice-yearly academic journal, but I would count it a privilege to receive correspondence and act upon suggestions. This journal aims, not to serve your career (except indirectly) nor to help deliver the last word in any debate affecting one's particular church at present, but rather to foster the frank exchange of theological suggestions, arguments, opinions, deeper reasons for holding these, and a taste of local distinctiveness, in which particulars the (universal) church is never far away.

By the time you read this the FEET conference should have taken place in Wolmersen (18-22 August 2002). That is one forum for Christians who share a belief in the transforming power of the gospel to meet from all across Europe, but there are others, and I would hope this journal is one less reason to feel isolated in the pursuit of theology and true spirituality.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and hard work of Jochen Eber (CH), Sylvain Romerowski (F), Rainer Behrens (UK) and up to and including this issue, Karl Moeller (UK).