

Editorial

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Setting the agenda? Responding to it? Are evangelicals too academic and not intellectual enough? In other words they are good at writing biblical commentaries but not in writing and promoting work which cross the disciplinary boundaries in the way, e.g., that of Michel Foucault affected sociology, literature and psychology. Yet as Edward Said has recently commented in the introduction to his re-issued *Orientalism*, the world cannot afford to do without what he calls 'philology' – patiently mining the details of religious and cultural traditions which will help to stand against the growing forces of homogenisation and disrespect for 'the other'. In other words, carefully doing exegesis and commentaries.

Christian theologians who are truly evangelical are called to maintain the balance between (a) the biblical and traditional (what Eberhard Jüngel called *wertlose Wahrheit*) and (b) the creative and the useful. It is when these things come together that a circuit is closed for spiritual energy to flow or to use a still more dramatic metaphor, lightning to fall from heaven to earth, with power and illumination the result!

One of the essays in this volume has to do with the life of the people of God and mission: one has more to do with the bible's message (by the way, IVP in England has been running a very good 'Message' series as part of its *Bible Speaks Today* title) and another theological with a historical flavour. It is good to have this balance, this polar potential difference.

A related question is should our theology be 'apologetic' or 'missionary'? Should we play like Italian football teams of old, the *cattanacio* style, on the defensive, giving a reason in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2; 1 Pet 3:15)? Does the need to be a listener and gentle with it preclude the provocative and the prophetic? Whatever, any communication with the non-church should take place without a forgetting of the *content* of the gospel – and as much emphasis on it and the fullness of its meaning for human life as study of culture and

human life. Books and papers about evangelical analysis of culture can be all very interesting but sometimes are in danger of playing the academic game of cultural studies even while adopting a critical stance towards the culture, worse finding themselves promoting a driving ideology under the cloak of 'description', or worse still, simply failing to be theological.

If evangelicals in North America feel the need to work with other Christian groupings, how much more need European evangelicals? Certainly our situation is not the same as that of our brothers and sisters there and we must be aware of that while reading even the best books from 'over there'. Do we have to see other traditions as not just allies for certain causes, but as where our identity must lie? Are Gospel people threatening those who identify themselves with a particular subculture or those who are happy to find their family where the spirit of Jesus is present and honoured? And just how to get scholars to work together so that one can speak of a theology of the gospel across Europe? There is a lot going on: the Scripture and Hermeneutics project – but hardly cross-European; Afet and Tyndale Fellowship, the new French initiative, Padova's IFED... Of course, the academic quality and level of discussion varies enormously. The sub-disciplines are also wide, such that it may seem sometimes to be better to avoid 'interdisciplinarity'. Perhaps a great effort in one small corner (say, Ancient Near Eastern history) leading to a shining light there would make more of a difference?

Of course theology starts with the church and it seems odd that the closest most European evangelical Christians get to theology is the works of Philip Yancey or of others, usually American. But the 'popularisers' of theology are the angels of God, to summon us to do likewise but better!

Then I am aware that theology starts with ourselves, and I realise I have asked many more questions than I have given answers...