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Editorial: Words, words, words...

Hetty Lalleman

You have the new issue of *EJT* before you with many articles worth reading. Publishing an article, a book or even a book review is the end of a whole process of studying, thinking, finding the right words, correcting ... and finally the product is there.

I always find it a great responsibility to publish a book. To say: this is it, now I am sending it off into the world. Who will read it? Who will be strengthened in their faith or widening their knowledge by what I have written? Or will people be discouraged?

There is one word missing in my above summary of the process, a word which for Christian theologians always needs to be part of it: praying. Praying in line with Psalm 19:14: ‘May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.’

Martin Luther was very aware of what words could do. He understood that it was of vital importance for people to read the Bible in their own language. Thanks to his translation of the Bible into German, the German language developed into one major language. Through words, in particular written words, his messages spread very quickly all over Europe. People were changed by what he said and wrote and there were many good words and messages that led people back to the basic message of the Gospel: we are saved by grace!

Yet Luther also hurt people with his words, in particular the Jews. After the FEET conference in Wittenberg last August, several of us visited the places that were influential in Luther’s life: Erfurt, Wartburg Castle, Eisenach. We saw in a museum how Luther’s words were abused by Hitler and the Nazi-regime. We do not always know what our words lead to and Luther was by no means a perfect man. This makes us all the more realise how important our words are, the spoken and the

written ones, and how they can influence for good or for bad.

Our world is full of words and many of them are idle gossip. While listening to debates for the American presidential elections last November we realised how debating can be almost similar to ‘throwing mud’.

Who is reliable in their words? Who speaks true and healthy words, words that give life instead of bringing destruction and chaos? As theologians we study the Word of God. Thank God for *his* Word! It is powerful, God spoke and creation came into being. It is reliable, God promised and his words came true! It is eternal: ‘... the word of our God endures for ever.’ (Isa. 40:8) More than ever the world needs *this* Word. As people who speak, teach, write about words God has spoken we carry a great responsibility. We interpret his Word, the Bible, and we are asked to be faithful messengers, transmitting God’s message in a way which is life-saving, building up and not breaking down God’s work in history. We need the daily contact with the One who came to earth as ‘the Word made flesh’, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We need the help of the Holy Spirit of whom Jesus said to his disciples: he ‘will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’. (John 14:26)

Yet in this way we can enjoy our position and calling all the more: the eternal God has chosen to use human beings like you and me to testify of his great love and wonderful deeds. In his service we do our work, we study, investigate, ask questions, formulate answers and put them into words. Let our words, spoken or written, be guided by the God who speaks through his Word, through his Son and even through our lives.

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