

# Editorial

## *Mark Elliott*

This volume of EJT is headed by two articles which have a common theme of the relationship between ethics, aesthetics and the Christian faith in a nineteenth or early twentieth-century setting – with lessons drawn for evangelical faith. We are introduced to figures who knew culture, even high culture, and did not despise it, but set Christ and his gospel over it as over all things.

The importance of God's grace in Christ and his gospel for overcoming boundaries of creatureliness and sin is also emphasised in the review article on Schmidt-Leukel's new book (which has appeared in German but not so far, for the benefit of his own students – in English!) Fourthly there is a second review article on a book which deals with the subject of just how mission-minded (and active) the first Christians were. Again this deals with themes of the gospel and culture. The evangelical faith will not leave the latter alone to its own fortunes, but will challenge it while being challenged and even helped to hear questions God would want asked.

The ambassadorial task of Reconciliation starts of course with God's reconciling himself to us. Then we are called to be reconciled to God and in turn (as Romans 7-8 illustrates) we struggle to be helped become reconciled within ourselves while (as 2 Cor 5 shows) we carry forward a message of reconciliation. Reconciliation has been the theme of the recent FEET conference in Prague August 2006 – and some papers from this conference will appear in the next volume of EJT. The matter of reconciliation is not about ticking off a list of issues but having reconciled hearts which while not being naïve or 'person-pleasing' is not automatically suspicious or taking pleasure in finding fault. The community of faith is about a bit of freedom, joy and worship in the midst of life. The New Testament speaks of people expelled from the church for immoral behaviour. In the case of false doctrine it tends to be that false teachers either get corrected or they leave. While the gospel gets preached

against error, the sinner is loved while the sin of untruth is hated.

Evangelicals might think that reconciliation which takes an ecumenical route is a waste of time in light of the need for evangelism and mission. We might think that Jesus' prayer in John 17 'that the may be one' was never intended to be applied in the way it has been recently – whether by the last Pope or the World Council of Churches. Yet witness to the world demands not a laissez-faire diversity of Christian churches offering different 'styles' to suit personality types and social backgrounds, but means calling some church leaders to account and preaching sound doctrine while not leaving the church as such. This is perhaps the lesson of John Stott's encouragement to evangelicals to maintain meaningful contact and involvement with churches whose commitment to the gospel may be doubtful. When a bishop expresses teaching which seems clearly contrary to Scripture and theological orthodoxy, it is time for a loving but firm rebuke in the spirit of 1 Timothy 5,1: 'intreat him as a father' as the Authorised Version puts it. As conservatives we need much persuasion to change position on matters well-preserved through the centuries. As evangelicals we have a positive message that is life-changing, if we are faithful to it. We have much to learn – from catholics on ecclesiology, liturgy and apologetics, from Orthodox on Christology and spirituality, to take just two examples. But we also have much to receive from each other, from French evangelicals who know what it is to be sharpened by the challenge of being cultural outsiders to Romanian evangelicals with a new confidence in the vacuum of political and civil society.

Again I take this opportunity to whoever is reading these words, to type some of their own and to send them to me for consideration for publication in this journal. Any contribution must have some connection with Europe and theology!