



## Editorial

At the General Assembly of 2000, Andrew McLellan, the then Moderator, issued a challenge for someone to provide a Scottish counterpart to Pierre Berton's book *The Comfortable Pew*, a searching critique of the Canadian church. The result was *Outside Verdict, An Old Kirk in a New Scotland* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2002) written by Harry Reid, former editor of *The Herald*, brought up in the Kirk and sympathetic to it but latterly one of the many no longer involved in its life. Its publication in May, has provoked significant discussion both in the church and in the media. This issue of the journal provides a forum for several substantial and considered reflections upon the book.

While Harry Reid is a journalist and not a theologian his critique of the Kirk does raise serious theological issues. Donald Macleod is an evangelical theologian of distinction and in asking 'By What Standard?' sets out an understanding of Reformed theology by which Reid's implicit theology might be measured and with which the responses to it must engage. Readers of this journal who might give a different answer to Professor Macleod's question will at least be stimulated to ask 'By What Theology?'

Much is made of demographic data in *Outside Verdict*. Michael Rosie, of Edinburgh University's Institute of Governance, brings forward further evidence of institutional decline which provide more refined detail than the Kirk's annual statistical returns. The figures in themselves cannot be other than depressing but do they tell the whole truth? The overall pattern of decline veils, I suspect, much of the new life and thinking which is emerging in the Church (and it is not all in conservative evangelical circles).



Perhaps we need more research to discern the shape of the new church which will emerge from the decay of the old.

Johnston McKay uniquely bridges the worlds of both church and media. His theological response to Reid's call for grand, open-air Easter Services parallels Rosie's demographic analysis. While Rosie is sceptical that such events would attract huge crowds, McKay raises a much more fundamental theological issue as to whether it is possible to celebrate Easter without an understanding of Good Friday. Perhaps this is an issue which must be integral to any proposal for a 'quick fix' to cure the malaise of institutions.

Parish ministers feature prominently in discussions about the present and future church, as do our administrative structures. Jean Montgomerie has given distinguished service both in the parish and as Convener of two main Boards of the General Assembly. It is important that we hear the voice of parish ministers. While many lament the failures of the church, I suspect that what success there is is a direct consequence of the commitment and dedication of most parish ministers to their congregations and communities. Further – and this the observation of a retiring College Principal – if the number of candidates is low, this is no reflection upon the calibre of candidates coming through for the standard is high, many having great ability. They will make a major contribution to the church.

I am grateful to Marjorie MacLean, Acting Principal Clerk, for being willing to stick her head above the parapet to provide an 'inside verdict'. Administrators are concerned (rightly) with what works and what does not and for setting out the reasons why things are as they are. The predictable response is an accusation of conservatism. Yet the dialogue between the revolutionaries and the 'evolutionaries' needs to be a permanent

feature of organisations and if Harry Reid's book catalyses this process it will have served an invaluable function.

Three shorter papers complete this symposium. Carole Hope writes as an elder and courageously raises issues of the future shape of the church in Scotland. David Fergusson provides a *Theological Postscript* which sets the present debate in a wider context. Finally, Harry Reid himself gives a personal response to some of the issues raised in the papers of this symposium. The Church of Scotland must be grateful to him for making us think about the future.

*Professor D.W.D. Shaw*

In taking over the Editorship, I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Professor Bill Shaw. This is no empty formality because it is largely due to his efforts that *Theology in Scotland* exists today. He has produced seventeen issues over eight years and without fail they have allowed 'Theology in Scotland' to find a voice. Readers owe Bill Shaw an enormous debt of gratitude for providing a theological forum characterised by articles which have been both perceptive and accessible. It is a singular honour to follow Bill as editor and I am delighted that he will continue to be involved on the technical and financial side of the journal. I am also very pleased that Professor Peter McEnhill of Westminster College, Cambridge has agreed to become Reviews Editor.

*David Lyall*

