

EDITORIAL

CHRISTIANITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The four papers presented in this issue of the *Bulletin* were given at the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society conference in April 1999 under the title 'What kind of Christianity for the twenty-first century?'

Christian churches around the world are engaged in a process of self evaluation, asking themselves: 'who are we?', 'where are we heading?', 'how well are we built?'; and at times wondering 'shall we make it?'. We stand at the 'threshold of the future'¹ facing the certainty of constant change within our contemporary culture, and yet with a confidence that God, whose very nature is a burning oven of love (Martin Luther), has covenanted to be with his people. Of course, the grace of God does not bypass our human response and responsibility, as God's 'fellow workers', to be faithful to our identity as the church, the body of Christ, Christ's human presence in the world. In this we find our identity and purpose.

One of the ancient metaphors of the church is that of a ship at sea. A ship is not built to stay in the harbour, sheltered from the storms of life. A ship is built to ride the waves and brave the storms. A ship with no substance breaks, and a ship that stands still will be beaten to pieces by the breakers. Yet the church has often sought the comfort of the harbour and refused to brave the seas in a spirit of adventure. At its best, the church has always become deeply involved in the whole of human life, sharing the message of redemption, justice and peace in a lost and lonely world. We are people of hope, believing in the 'Coming of God',² confident that one day his purposes will triumph, God will be all in all, and that 'the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).

The articles in the *Bulletin* will help us to understand many of the challenges that the church faces at this particular moment in human history, critiquing our failures, as well as providing guidance as to how, as the church, we might recover our vision and be renewed in faith, hope and obedience to the purposes of God for his world.

¹ Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future* (London, 1998).

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (London, 1996).