



Editorial

There was a time, not many years ago, when Assemblies of the World Council of Churches impinged upon the life of the churches, or at least upon that of people with some real involvement in the life of the church – New Delhi, Uppsala, Nairobi, Vancouver There was an awareness that these events were taking place, that Scottish churches were represented and that this was of some importance in the grand scheme of things. But Port Alegre ...? It may be a purely personal perspective but it seems to me that there has been less public awareness of the most recent ecumenical gathering than in the case of previous assemblies. This issue of *Theology in Scotland* attempts to bring to a wider audience something of the work of the 9th Assembly held earlier this year through the reflections of some of those who were there, and to begin an exploration of the current state of ecumenism in Scotland.

Sheilagh Kesting, Norman Shanks, Archbishop Conti and Graham McGeoch were all there, and each shares a particular perspective on that Assembly which is integrally related to their own personal ecumenical pilgrimage. Sheilagh Kesting has special responsibilities within the Church of Scotland for matters ecumenical and describes the particular problems of the ‘national church’, previously so committed both in theory and practice to the wider ecumenical movement but seemingly finding it difficult to act ecumenically within twenty-first century Scotland. Archbishop Conti shares with us something of his own journey, helping us understand the issues which face the Catholic Church in Scotland. Like many Scots, Norman Shanks found himself a Presbyterian by ‘genetic accident’ and has sought to live out his life and ministry through a deep commitment both to his own tradition and to the wider Church. And Graham McGeoch, a Church of Scotland ministerial candidate, has moved from being to one the younger representatives at Port Alegre to the very heart of the decision making process within the WCC.

John Harvey was not at Port Alegre but, like Norman Shanks, is a former Leader of the Iona Community, surely a Scottish institution

which has managed to embody the ecumenical ideal. John describes and reflects upon two situations from his own ministry where practical ecumenism has made a difference to communities within Scotland. Kevin Franz was not at Port Alegre either but has read the other papers and from his key position within ACTS looks forward towards the future.

When I was an undergraduate in 1956, the so-called ‘Bishops Report’ burst upon an unsuspecting Scotland and its Kirk suggesting that the Church of Scotland might take some form of episcopacy into its system. At the time there was great controversy in the media and little support for the main proposal. Perhaps little has changed in the last half century except that today controversy might be replaced by indifference. But all is not lost. While institutional union seems as far away as ever, there does appear to be more ecumenical co-operation at the local level. For this we can be thankful but there is still a long way to go in response to what many of us would regard as an ecumenical imperative – unity (not uniformity) for reasons which are both theological and practical in terms of common witness and the sharing of precious resources. It is hoped that the papers in the issue may be of some use in moving in that direction.

David Lyall