# Introduction

As a first-time jury member for the Alcuin Society 2001 Book Design Awards, I found the juried catalogues of the previous Design Award winners both inspirational and intimidating. The catalogues show how seriously the Alcuin Society and their jurors take these awards, and how much they value good design in Canadian books. Awards for the book design industry are few and far between. Book designers are so seldom celebrated that every effort should be made to encourage and highlight their accomplishments. These juried catalogues year after year reveal the number of talented people who devote their time and effort to improve the look of the Canadian book. This is but a selection of the wide range and variety of the wonderfully designed books that appear every year in Canada. It was both a pleasure and a privilege for all the judges to advance this project for the Alcuin Society for 2001.

These catalogues also show a design community that is uncertain about its direction, and uncertain about whether to admonish itself or celebrate its accomplishments. Some jurors have been critical of the industry while others have chosen to celebrate their accomplishments. Other have compromised and gone right down the middle. I believe that the intention of this year's jury was from the very beginning to take a central path; both to admonish when required but more importantly to celebrate the accomplishments of 2001.

For what these catalogues also show is that book design in Canada faces similar problems year after year. The books may be different but the issues remain. How often were the comments of previous jurors exactly the same for the three of us in April 2002. The books of 2001 contain the same errors as those from 1996, 1998 and 2000. Fine

covers but badly designed texts, inappropriate or poorly selected typefaces, or careless spacing all continue to bedevil us. In several instances the comments and criticisms of previous years could be copied verbatim and used again for the award winners listed below.

The question that naturally follows is: has Canadian book design improved in these past few years? As an amateur observer of the Canadian industry I believe it has; that Canadian book design has made great advances. There are others who will disagree, who will point out all the design faults in all the books we present to them. And who would claim that they are wrong? There are problems in all areas of book production. Design is not an exact science and is as subject to taste and fashion as any other industry. For everyone who senses an improvement there is someone who notes a decline. There are those who justifiably claim that an award that looks only at production values and ignores the content of a book is absurd, especially in the Canadian industry where having any book published and marketed is often a miracle in itself.

Whatever your opinion on this issue, whatever your role, whatever your interest in this industry, we must face the fact that there will always be problems with book design and typography. There will always be carelessness and error. This is not unique to Canada or to publishing. The main objective, however, of this 2001 catalogue and of the Alcuin Society, remains: to celebrate the artistry and to improve the visual identity of the Canadian book, however incrementally or steadily it advances.

Randall Speller
Toronto