

# Editorial

Things change slowly in the life of the Church, and it would be most unwise to predict that a debate in General Synod will alter the tone of ecclesiastical life for years to come, or that a vote here and there will upset the delicate balance of forces which vested interests of all kinds are at such pains to maintain. Yet 1985 has seen movement on three fronts which may yet shake the Church of England to its foundations, an event for which we are ill-prepared in Evangelical circles. First, there was the debate about the views of the Bishops of Durham; second, the proposals for the remarriage of divorced persons in Church, and third, the latest round in the campaign for the ordination of women.

On the first point, it was never realistic to suppose that our bishops would take action against one of their number for holding views not all that different from their own. The liberal rot has gone too far in the corridors of Church power for anything like that to be expected. But that does not detract from the great courage shown by David Holloway and his fellow clergy of the North-East—a courage sadly lacking in the Evangelical theological colleges—in daring to bring a *gravamen* to the floor of Synod. What a shock to discover that that body has for once been obliged to discuss theology, instead of its usual nuts-and-bolts business! Attempts have been made before to get Synod moving onto the important issues of belief—the last time in the wake of the Doctrine Commission report of 1976, and *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977), but they have always been successfully deflected from the chair. This time that has not happened, and dirty linen has been aired in public in a way which is almost as surprising as the trial of Polish security policemen who murdered a Roman Catholic priest. This new openness is all to the good, and what has not succeeded this time (for the old regime is still in place) may well get further when it is tried again—as tried it certainly will be, if another David Jenkins is appointed to an episcopal see.

The remarriage of divorced persons in Church is a pedestrian matter by comparison, but in the nature of things it is liable to have a greater effect on the average person (not to say, parson). Who will do what, and on what ground? It is idle to suppose that Scripture will be allowed to rule; the whole issue has arisen only because the plain teaching of the New Testament has caused great inconvenience to some people, which is taken to mean that the former must give way to the latter. There are always difficult cases of course, and the old rules were bound to appear hard on some. But when all is said and done, the sanctity of the marriage bond, and the wholeness of the family which depends on it, are principles which the Church will sacrifice to

its own destruction. Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder—not even if it is expedient to do so.

As for the ordination of women, the battle will now be heating up and entering what may well turn out to be its final stages. A few years ago, it would have been taken for granted that the march of progress, and the knowledge that the women concerned would not go away until their demands were met, might have swayed the vote in their favour, quite apart from other considerations. That may still prove to be the case, but the conservative mood of the moment may yet hold surprises in store for us. Yet whatever the final outcome, there is little cause for rejoicing. Once more, the plain teaching of the New Testament has been set aside ('Paul was a man of his time') and the issue has been fought between Church traditionalists who will not step in where Rome fears to tread, and liberals who see themselves as God's messengers to a hidebound Church. Even those few who have thought to look at the Scriptures have too often come away with their minds firmly rooted in the principle of cultural relativity—a convenience which absolves them from many things. Doctrine may be returning to the agenda of General Synod, but we are still a long way from having a Church which listens to, and obeys, the voice of the Bible, whatever the cost. May God grant us the courage to make this voice heard in the years ahead.

GERALD BRAY

## In Memoriam

Raymond Johnston, who had been chairman of the editorial board of the *Churchman* since the beginning of 1984, passed away at the age of 58 on 17th October. By training a modern linguist and a teacher, who had also been a lecturer in Education at the University of Newcastle on Tyne, he had made himself one of that now rare breed, a capable lay theologian. Of recent years he had devoted his energies to moral questions, and in particular to the maintenance of Christian moral standards in the church and in society, which led him to leave university work and accept appointment as full-time director of the Festival of Light (later, Care Campaigns). In this capacity, he devoted himself to informing the general public by addresses and popular literature, to briefing members of both Houses of Parliament, and to countless other ways of countering moral decline. Within the church, he was an active member of the General Synod, and before that of Church Assembly, where he vigorously pursued

*continued on p. 380*