

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

FRANK E. ROBSON

By the time you read this you will probably have had your fill of 'Millennium Messages' or mission statements, but the turn, not only of the year, but also of the century and the millennium is surely a time for taking stock, and I hope that you will bear with me if I take this opportunity to look back over the Society's relatively short history, and try to look to the future.

As Quentin Edwards says in his account of the foundation of the Society, contained in this issue of the journal (page 316), the Society has fulfilled, and in many ways exceeded, the expectations of those who gathered at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge for its founding in March 1987. There are now more than 500 members, and, whilst the vast majority are from Britain, we can claim to be worldwide with members from as far away as Canada and Australia. The finances are sound and this Journal flourishes and is widely respected. Our pattern of annual conferences—a residential weekend one year and a day conference the next—is well established, and the conferences themselves continue to be interesting, relevant and sociable events.

Over the past thirteen years interest in and the study of Ecclesiastical Law has grown enormously. I can safely say that more books on the subject have been published since 1987 (two having been sponsored by the Society) than were published in the previous fifty years. In the same period we have seen the establishment of the LLM Canon Law course at Cardiff, which is so much in demand that there is a waiting list, and those of you who are on the Internet will have seen the amazing (at least to me) amount of material that can be found there. The Society does not yet have its own web site, although this is likely to be established soon. There is also 'An Ordered Church', the course in Canon and Ecclesiastical Law that was launched in September, and which is referred to elsewhere in this issue. The education of the clergy in the law of the Church is at the heart of what the Society is seeking to achieve, and the publication of 'An Ordered Church' shows that we are well on course.

Yet we cannot afford to be complacent. In the early years of the Society there were always about ten active working parties. Today there is only one—the working party on the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction (Discipline) Measure at present going through Synod—whose input has been so well received that it has been asked to send a representative to meetings of the Revision Committee. Clearly the work done in working parties can have considerable influence, so why are there no others? I do not think that it can be for lack of suitable subjects. There have been a number of matters over the years that might have benefited from consideration by a working party, but have not been taken up. It may be that in this modern world we all consider that we are much too busy to be able to find time for meetings of working parties, but there may be less need for actual meetings now that the Internet, and in particular e-mail, are so much part of our lives. I should like to hear from you as to why you think working parties may have declined, or, indeed whether, or not, you think working parties are a good thing. Please write (or e-mail) to me with your views, especially if you would like to suggest a subject for consideration by a working party, or to be a member of a working party.

In this connection I shall be interested to see how James Behrens' initiative in reviving the London Lectures fares. As you will see elsewhere in this issue (page 368) he has put together an interesting programme, which I hope will be well supported. It is another function in London, however, which causes me to wonder what support there might be for local initiatives elsewhere. I know that at one time there were meetings in the South West, and I believe that some thought is being given to the possibility of something being done in the North East, so what about the Midlands and

the North West? Would members in those parts be interested in a lecture or seminar in, say, Birmingham or Manchester? Again I shall be grateful for a letter or e-mail, and if there is likely to be support, I shall do my best to see that something happens.

As to the future, the practice of the law has changed enormously in my professional lifetime, and with the growth in information technology it is now changing so quickly that it is difficult to know where we shall be in six months' time, let alone ten years' time. One thing is certain, however, and that is that whatever changes there may be, there will still be a need for lawyers, and I believe that the Society will continue to fill a need, and to flourish and prosper. Finally, if I may mention a hope that I have for the future, it is that the links between Anglican and Roman Catholic Canon lawyers that have begun with such matters as the Lyndwood Lectures, may have sown a seed that will continue to grow and to flourish, not only during this next century, but also throughout the new millennium.

## ELS CONFERENCES

### LONDON DAY CONFERENCE 2000

#### Deployment of the Clergy

This conference will explore clergy rôles, status and conditions of service, **on Saturday, 25th March** from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. The speakers will be the Bishop of Dorchester, the Venerable Gordon Kuhrt, and the Revd Stephen Trott. There is a booking form with this issue of the *Journal*; complete and return it now to ensure a place.

### CAMBRIDGE RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE 2001

#### Religious Liberty and Human Rights

This important event will be held at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, a centre of legal scholarship for 650 years, **from 30th March to 1st April**. The speakers will include Mr Mark Chopko, General Counsel of the US Catholic Conference, Professor Javier Martines-Torron of the University of Granada, Sir Stephen Sedley, Lord Justice of Appeal, Professor Ian Leigh of the University of Durham and Professor Simon Lee, Rector of Liverpool Hope University College. The preacher will be the Rt Revd John Gladwin, Bishop of Guildford. Book the date now; booking will commence with the July issue of the *Journal*.