

EDITORIAL

WILL ADAM

December 2020 saw the 850th anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. Fifty years later, in 1220, his remains were transferred to the shrine that was to become a major centre of pilgrimage until the Reformation. Becket was the 38th Archbishop of Canterbury and it is a great pleasure to have as the leading article in the issue of the *Journal* the text of a lecture on Becket by the 104th Archbishop, Rowan Williams. In this lecture he draws together recent scholarship on the perennially fascinating character of Becket and the disputes that led to the loss of his life.

On the anniversary of the martyrdom the 105th Archbishop, Justin Welby, pointed to the example of his saintly predecessor:

He had once lived a life full of the intrigues and battles of politics, but as Archbishop chose a simpler life, with Jesus Christ as the pattern of his calling. As the 105th Archbishop, I do not fear for my life even when entering controversial political discussions. However, around the world there are still those who face discrimination, persecution and death for their faith.¹

It remains the case that freedom of religion is not something to be taken for granted and that persecution on the grounds of religion and belief remains a major threat to human rights in different parts of the world.

Elsewhere in this issue we are pleased to carry an article by Professor Russell Sandberg on the ongoing question of marriage law reform, and a further article by Dr Idowu Akinloye on disputes in churches in southern Africa, following his article last year on clergy discipline in South Africa and Nigeria.² The Comment section hosts two items, both of which started life as lectures in the increasingly popular and important lecture series hosted by the Ecclesiastical Law Society.

The pandemic continues to take its toll on church and academic life, despite the hard work and ingenuity of people the world over. The synod reports, a regular feature in the January issue of the *Journal*, have been held over to this

- 1 Press Association, 'St Thomas Becket: archbishop hails "model" saint 850 years after his murder', 29 December 2020, <<https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/st-thomas-becket-archbishop-hails-model-saint-850-years-after-his-murder>>, accessed 29 January 2021.
- 2 I Akinloye, 'Legal disputes involving clergy discipline: perspectives from Nigeria and South Africa', (2020) 22 Ecc LJ 194–233.

issue, and show the flexibility of representative church government in the face of public health emergencies. There is, as well, a real sense of hope that an equitable and thorough process of vaccination will enable the world, together, to move through this phase and to return to a life that, if not as we once knew it, is hopefully better, fairer and more just than before.