

EDITORIAL

WILL ADAM

In mid-October 2019 I had the privilege of attending the canonisation of St John Henry Newman in Rome. There was a small Anglican delegation present for this event which was very important in the life of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. St John Henry Newman may be most famous for having converted from the Church of England (he had been the vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, for 15 years) to the Catholic Church in 1845, but his literary and theological legacy is enormous. His writings, from both before and after 1845, have influenced the development of theology and Christian education in both churches.

The canonisation took place while the Catholic Church's Synod of Bishops for the Amazon was in session in Rome. Alongside the 185 clerical (and largely episcopal) voting members there were a number of lay people from the Amazon region present at the meeting, many of whom were able to speak and take part in group work. St John Henry Newman left the Church of England before the advent of synodical government, but he did have a great deal to say about consulting the laity in the matters of the Church. In his controversial work *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859), Newman argued that the laity had a part to play in the preservation of the tradition of the Church. His stress on the importance of the *consensus fidelium* caused him considerable difficulty at the time, one Monsignor Talbot declaring him 'the most dangerous man in England'. The debate about the balance of determinative and consultative authority within churches carries on today across the ecumenical spectrum.

It was noted in the most recent statement of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), *Walking Together on the Way* (2017), that the two Churches still approach the balance of clerical and lay decision-making authority differently. For the Church of England, the involvement of clergy and laity together in decision-making is hard-wired into the system: from parochial church councils to General Synod. The special role of the House of Bishops in synodical decisions touching doctrine and liturgy reflects an acknowledgement of the special place of episcopal teaching in the sphere of doctrine, of which, I am sure, Newman would approve.