

EDITORIAL

WILL ADAM

In May this year I had the privilege of visiting the German Protestant Churches' 'Kirchentag', a festival on an enormous scale that took over the centre of Berlin, closing the main thoroughfares. Keynote events took place on vast open-air stages at such iconic venues as the Bundestag and the Brandenburg Gate. In this metropolitan 'world city' there were, however, reminders of the divisions of the past. Not far from the stage at the Bundestag is a monument to the Berlin Wall and as you walk around the centre of the city there are occasional reminders in such innocent tokens as street furniture as to which side of the iconic wall you would have been. The Kirchentag took place just a few days after the Manchester terrorist attack and, in a powerfully touching act of solidarity, flags flew at half-mast around Berlin.

There is in this a story of reconciliation and a story of division. Berlin stands as an icon of a city and people once seemingly irreconcilably divided and now united. The terror attacks in Manchester, Westminster and Southwark point to an ongoing need for reconciliation in our world and in our societies.

Disagreement is a given. How people disagree and how people relate to those with whom they disagree may be changed. In this issue of the *Journal* we revisit the issue of disagreement on human sexuality in both European jurisprudence (in the article by Professor Andrea Pin) and the United Reformed Church (through the work of your editor's 'Doktorvater', Dr Augur Pearce). In Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, Parliament was said to be constantly discussing its 'annual blister' of the various Deceased Wife's Sister Marriage Bills. For the Church of today, questions of marriage and sexuality remain on the agenda. Total agreement is as far off as it has ever been, so moving to a situation where Christians can disagree well and not anathematise the other now becomes the goal.

October 2017 sees the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, with the commemoration of the date when Martin Luther nailed his infamous ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg. This event, though not the first example of dissent in the late medieval Church, started a chain of events that sent a fissure through the Western Church. Countless lives were lost and Christians declared each other to be damned from either side of the fault-line that ran first through Europe prior to being exported

around the world. And yet, earlier this year, the third phase of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Dialogue (ARCIC III) met in the old East Germany, in the city where Luther had lived in his Augustinian friary and had received his ordination, and agreed a convergence statement on the Church, local, regional and universal. When the statement is published it will be known as the Erfurt Document after that key Lutheran city.

The Reformation affected thought, society and the law, as well as theology and church governance. In the first article in this issue, Professor John Witte Jr, a member of our distinguished Editorial Board, outlines the legal legacy of Lutheran Protestantism. His article concludes with a translation of the great Lutheran hymn ‘Ein feste Burg’. At the risk of being sermonic, the stronghold or fortress that is our God will ultimately defend us. A mighty fortress has strong walls that not only keep out the attacker but prevent those inside from falling away and keep the community from fragmentation.