

An achievement of moral and practical usefulness

THE NEW MACHINERY of co-operation between Churches, both in the British Isles as a whole and in their constituent parts, is being set in motion without panache. Thankfulness, even surprise, is being expressed; but excessive claims are not being made. This is sensible. The time is not propitious to ecumenical advance. The stalwarts of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission soldier on, but cannot quite disguise from the rest of the world the fact that the Vatican is deeply bored by the careful prose they produce. The United Reformed Church, which has set other British Churches a shining example of readiness to merge its identity with old rivals, has been repaid with a sharper decline in membership than has been suffered by most other Churches. It remains as true as ever that where two or three are gathered together, two or three different ways of believing

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and worshipping will pertain. Division is human. The point is verified within the Church of England; even within the various groupings inside it. Public criticism of Catholics by Catholics, or of Evangelicals by Evangelicals, is familiar to readers of these pages. The maxim that there is no enmity like the enmity between first cousins keeps its force. It may be true that more unites them than divides them, but it is what divides them that rankles.

The Churches of Britain and Ireland are none the less right to remind themselves of what unites them, and to do it with a certain formality. The achievement has moral and practical value. It is right that the Churches which minister mainly to

black people should be associated on terms of visible equality with Churches whose existence has thus far been more comfortable. It is right that Nonconformists, whose historic influence has been invaluable in forming and maintaining a conscience in English public life, should be able to join with fellow churchpeople in organisations which keep their national influence from being extinguished. It is right that Roman Catholics should enrol themselves in institutions which acknowledge the increasing place their Church has come to take in the national discourse. But there is value in these arrangements also for the Church of England. Speaking alone on what are judged to be political topics, its leaders can incur uncomprehending hostility. If they are seen to stand with the great body of their fellow believers in these islands, they will be better understood.

With nominations now closed in the elections for the Church of England's General Synod, leaders of Synod's three main groups suggest what electors should have in mind

Authority of God's word

I HOPE you will look for candidates who can apply clear, patient thinking to the issues facing the Church, with a deep desire for the spiritual and administrative renewal and reform which are necessary if the gospel is to advance. Clear thinking — to assess the right way forward where there is no easy answer. Patience — because in every institution there is a built-in resistance to change; the Church of England is very good at preserving the status quo long after it needed change. Spiritual renewal — to add the exhilarating life and unity which the Spirit gives to the more humdrum unity of belonging to a single organisation. Administrative reform — so that central

Women priests and Europe

FIRST, vote for someone with the Kingdom of God and his glory right at the top of their agenda. You can test this by their fruits (Mt 7.16-20), by their tolerance and by their love (1 John 4.7). Watch out for angry people and do not give them your vote.

Second, vote for someone who is in favour of the ordination of women. Women are already ordained in the Anglican Communion and will be ordained in the Church of England soon: hopefully within two years, certainly within ten. Eighty-nine per cent of Anglicans are OK about this. Let us get on with it, accepting the fullness of women's gifts into the ministry of the Church of England; and then, saying a sad farewell to those who can no longer travel with

A commitment to unity

IN EVERY DIOCESE there will be priests, laywomen and laymen standing in the election as supporters of the Catholic Group. The group is not a political party but a broad coalition of like-minded people. What principles guide and mould the Catholic Group?

The Catholic Revival was an attempt to remind the Church of England that it was but part of the universal Church, and its faith, doctrine and worship need continually to be assessed in relation to the rest of Catholic Christianity. Catholics were and are strongly committed to Christian unity, and sought to emphasise what we had in common with other Christians. Anglicanism is not a sect but an English expression of the universal faith. It is



Hugh Montefiore

Divided but less unjust

DURING the first six months that I have written this column, I have kept off political and social questions; but now, when parliamentary attention is focused elsewhere, it may be opportune to introduce them. Over the 12 years since the Tories' return to power, the Church of England has often been accused of interfering unduly in politics (although a study of English history shows this to be unfair). During this period welfare benefits have for many been reduced, the number of homeless has increased, the housing stock is in poor repair, standards of education have lapsed, unemployment has increased, the NHS has run into trouble, and the poll tax bears more heavily on the poor than on the wealthy. Overall, official statistics show that the rich have got richer, and the poor comparatively poorer. Doubtless members of different political