

## OBITUARY

# The Revd C. Wansey

*The Revd Clifford Owen writes:*

THE REVD Joseph Christopher Wansey, who died shortly before Christmas in Kenilworth where he and Olive had their retirement home, was a reformer through and through.

Ordained in 1934 to a title at Walthamstow, Christopher went out to Japan in 1937 with CMS, until that Church became independent. Then followed a year in West Africa. It was this background, contrasted with a first incumbency in wartime Manchester, that ignited his reformer's zeal. He wrote of this time: "I was shocked at the state of the Church in so-called Christian England."

Initially, indiscriminate baptism was his target, and when he moved to Woodford in Essex, in 1946, he began to work out a pastoral policy that was to reduce greatly the number of infants baptised. Coupled with this was a pastoral move to heighten engaged couples' awareness of their Christian vows. The key to his work was the pastoral interview, but this led to opposition and division in the parish. Most incumbents would have been broken by such a conflict, but Christopher rode out the storm. He won a High Court legal action in 1953, and carried on in the parish for another ten years.

In 1964 he moved to Roydon where, at his induction, the then Bishop of Chelmsford granted an alteration in the wording of the service which in effect allowed him not to baptise any infants — a precedent rarely followed. Though it began with baptism, his reforming attention moved on to liturgical revision, the infant catechumenate, the appointment of bishops, and the roles of clergy and laity. Being a Proctor in Convocation from 1952 onwards, and a member of the first General Synod, he was a seasoned performer in debate.

In his book, *The Clockwork Church*, he says: "It becomes obvious that the opportunity to start the reforming process must be seized early on in the life of a parish priest, while he still has an independent mind and the time and courage to exercise it." When I met him for the first time in 1988, the reforming fire was still burning. As Wycliffe was to the Protestant Reformation, so was Christopher Wansey to a number of issues still to be faced by the Church of England.

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