

Interfaith Legal Advisers Network: Inaugural Meeting

Cardiff Law School, 7 December 2007

RUSSELL SANDBERG

Doctoral student, Centre for Law and Religion, Cardiff University

As part of its tenth anniversary celebrations,¹ the Centre for Law and Religion at Cardiff University has established the Interfaith Legal Adviser Network (ILAN), the first of its kind in the UK. The Network seeks to facilitate an ongoing discussion, providing members with a greater understanding of their respective religious legal systems and the common legal issues they face. The inaugural meeting of the Network was held at Cardiff Law School on 7 December 2007.

The meeting was attended by 18 religious legal advisers and administrators representing a number of Christian groups, including the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, the Roman Catholic Church, the Society of Friends, the United Reformed Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Order of St Lazarus, as well as other faith communities, such as the Sikh and Jewish communities. The meeting was also attended by practising barristers Neil Addison and Samantha Knights and members of the Centre for Law and Religion.

During the first session, the religious legal advisers and administrators made brief presentations upon their own religious legal systems and how they are administered at the interface with the civil law of the state. A great number of common experiences emerged: how they all use internal rules to run their organisations; how these rules reflect religious beliefs; how there are great similarities in the subjects dealt with by these rules; and the importance of those rules in running the organisations. Another common experience is how these groups all face new challenges posed by the considerable increase in state law on religion in recent years.

After lunch, the second session consisted of two papers by members of the Centre. Frank Cranmer provided a thorough overview of recent developments in state law on religion, covering a number of topics including constitutional law, discrimination law and burial law. Professor Peter Luxton presented an

1 For a review of the Centre's work and achievements in the last decade, see N Doe, 'Centre for Law and Religion: The First Ten Years' at page 222 of this issue.

erudite consideration of the impact of recent changes in charity law and their impact on religion. In the discussion that followed, members clearly welcomed the opportunity to share their views on these matters, and learned much from each other about their understandings of and responses to the growing state law on religion.

The final session discussed the future of the Network and was chaired by Mark Hill, a barrister with considerable experience of litigating religious disputes and an Honorary Professor at Cardiff University. The members felt it important to meet again in six months and a second meeting has now been arranged for 16 June 2007. It was agreed that the Network should become an established feature of the work of the Centre for Law and Religion at Cardiff. The inaugural meeting highlighted not only the wide range of issues in the field but also the importance of sharing and learning from each other's experiences. It is hoped that the Interfaith Legal Adviser Network at Cardiff will provide the forum for this vital exchange for a number of years to come.

doi: 10.1017/S0956618X08001233