

place in which, through the application of the principles of *oikonomia* and *akribeia*, he brings to the faithful in need the healing mercy of the Lord.

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## The Teaching of Church Law, Order and Polity in Ministerial Education

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The historic and prestigious surroundings of Harvard University were the setting for a workshop organised by the Centre for Law and Religion at Cardiff University. The gathering, conceived by the ever-innovative Professor Norman Doe, Director of the Centre, set out to explore, from an ecumenical perspective, ‘The teaching of church law, order and polity in ministerial education’.

More than forty academics, teachers and practitioners of church law, mostly from the USA, but also from Canada, England, Wales, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium and South Africa, met in the Braun Room of Harvard Divinity School (HDS). Professor Dudley Rose, Associate Dean for Ministry Studies at HDS, opened the proceedings and he, together with Leslie MacPherson-Artinian, was thanked for making the day possible, as were Bishop Stacy Sauls and David Beers from The Episcopal Church, for their sponsorship. Among the lawyers, the Christian denominations represented were: Roman Catholic, Anglican/Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Dutch Reformed and several other reformed churches.

Following an introduction by Norman Doe to the general study of church law, order and polity, the workshop sessions scrutinised five areas:

- i. The purposes of teaching church law, order and polity (with a keynote introduction by Barry Ensign-George of the Presbyterian Mission Agency);
- ii. The subjects of study (James Conn SJ, Professor of Canon Law at Boston College);
- iii. Methods of study (Hélène Evers of the Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven);

- iv. Networks for the study of church law, order and polity (Norman Doe); and
- v. Consideration of the possibility of whether there would be longer-term value in setting up an international network of teachers and scholars in this field for greater ecumenical understanding (led by Professor Mark Hill QC).

The fascinating array of questions discussed gave rise to an equally intriguing range of responses. For example, in some settings (the Roman Catholic Church and many of the reformed churches present), church law/polity constitutes fully accredited courses on the curriculum of ministerial training, with teaching input of between 39 and 72 hours over a three-year period. The pattern in Anglican settings is much patchier. Among Anglicans present, some had no church law teaching at all; one had a six-hour module; and the seminary with the strongest focus had a final-year optional canon-law course with 30 hours of teaching input.

The subject matter of the courses is, unsurprisingly, clear in the Roman Catholic Church. Among the reformed churches, the subjects typically include: orientation and introduction to church polity, governance system, theological foundations, missional church work, historical background, scripture in church polity, offices, property and church–state relations. The longest of the Anglican/Episcopal courses encompasses the following elements: law and theology, terminology, tools for understanding the law, history, structures, the role of the bishop, the disciplinary framework, property and liturgy. In one Anglican setting (Ireland), the short course focuses first on the civil-law context – religion in the law of the state, freedom of religion in the Irish Constitution, the voluntary nature of religious organisations, the responsibilities of church members in civil law – before looking at an overview of the internal religious law of the Church of Ireland.

Similarly, discussion about the methods used revealed a panoply of approaches: lectures, workshops, case studies, hypothetical problem-solving and research papers. In one context, law students and seminarians are taught together. Approaches to evaluation (if at all) are also very different. Formal evaluation in some churches requires students to sit examinations, to research projects and to submit essays, while others merely look for active participation in the course.

The variety of approaches to teaching church law made for a workshop of fascinating input, lively discussion and enriching mutual exchange and learning. For this writer, the ecumenical dialogue with the other ecclesiastical traditions exposed the haphazard approach within Anglicanism to the teaching of the subject in ministerial training.

At the outset of the workshop it was Barry Ensign-George, addressing the question 'Why study church law?', who challenged us to scrutinise and evaluate our own attitudes to church law in ministerial education. Using the analogy of a game, he said:

skilled and gifted leaders need to be good at and to play the game. To that end they need to know the rules of the game . . . It is about ecclesiology; polity [church law] is deeply rooted in ecclesial structure. It enables us to live together what we believe about the Church.

Referring to Galatians 6:2 ('Bear one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ') he asked that church polity/law be envisioned as the set of commitments, the bonds of love, that create the space for our mutual relationships to flourish within the Church.

As the concluding discussion, facilitated by Professor Mark Hill QC, showed, there is certainly scope for further ecumenical discussion and work in this area.

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