

chaplains and combatants in the two world wars; indeed even chaplains, my father among them at the siege of Kohima, have been authorised (at least by the military authorities) to bear arms in defence of others. As far as the author has been able to ascertain, none of those clergy were ever brought before the ecclesiastical authorities for so doing. Today any arms-bearing by Anglican clergy (whether in times of peace or war) is likely to be considered by any clergy tribunal in relation to Canons C 27, 28 and 29. The author is clearly correct when he says that ‘these canons do not in any explicit way prohibit any manner of armsbearing’ (p 220) but, again, I doubt that he is correct when he goes on to comment that ‘one would be hard put to defend such an interpretation as implied by the language of the canons’ (ibid). Hopefully time will not be called upon to tell who is right!

Finally, it is excellent to see in such an academic work references to both the Ecclesiastical Law Society and this *Journal* (p 17). This is surely a proof of the coming of age of both.

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In Order to Serve: An Ecumenical Introduction to Church Polity

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In 1974 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in ‘The ecumenical movement and church law’, suggested that ‘churches differ in their order and their constitution’, that ‘differences in the structures and legal systems of the churches have their roots in different confessional traditions’ and that these differences concern ‘not only the actual order which the churches have, but also the general orientation by which their legislation is inspired’.² The document called for further exploration of the subject, but this was not pursued. The principal focus of the ecumenical movement, in the practice of ecumenism (for example, bilateral and multilateral dialogues) and in ecumenical theology (the study of ecumenism), has been the quest for agreement at the level of doctrine achieved through theological debate. The juridical instruments of churches have not thus far featured as part of the staple diet of ecumenical discourse. This has led some, such as the distinguished

2 World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission, Document IV.8 (1974).

Roman Catholic canonist Robert Ombres OP, to view church law/order/polity as the ‘missing link’ in ecumenism.

In this excellent book, Leo Koffeman, a professor of church polity and ecumenism at the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam, and a member of the Faith and Order Commission, seeks to address this deficit, writing in the main but not exclusively from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. Published in the series Church Polity and Ecumenism: Global Perspectives (edited jointly by the author and Johannes Smit), *In Order to Serve* recognises that ecclesiology (that branch of theology which develops understandings of the nature and purposes of the Church universal) is at the centre of current ecumenical dialogue. This is attested to in the fact that the most recent paper of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, ‘The Church: towards a common vision’ (2013), itself acknowledges that ‘agreement on ecclesiology has long been identified as the most elemental theological objective in the quest for Christian unity’.³ However, argues Koffeman, this focus on ecclesiology does not include theological reflection on church polity. In his book, he aims to explore new avenues of the role of church polity in ecclesiology and ecumenism. The book is ‘an attempt to enhance a truly ecumenical and inter-cultural approach of the theological discipline of church polity, without neglecting its juridical character’ (back cover). The relationship between theology and law, maintaining their distinct ecclesial identities and developing the view of church law as applied ecclesiology have for a long time exercised jurists in several different Christian traditions with regard to their own systems of law and polity. Koffeman now seeks to engage in this task on the more ambitious canvas of global ecumenism.

In the introduction, Koffeman names the regulatory object of his study. After exploring the various categories (across the traditions) of ‘canon law’, ‘church law’ and ‘church order’, he proposes that

Church polity as a theological discipline is: the systematic analysis, evaluation and development of the sum total of established rules as a legal system that governs structure and legal relations within churches, as well as their mutual relations and their relations to respective states, from the perspective of ecclesiology. (p 3)

Thereafter, the book is divided into four parts. Part I addresses church polity as a theological discipline; it has chapters on church polity and ecclesiology, ecumenical church polity, manifestations of the church, church structures, and church polity and church law. For Koffeman, church polity is ‘based on theological

3 World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission, ‘The Church: towards a common vision’ (2013), preface, p. viii.

choices' (p 13) about ministry, power and structure; it has a 'biblical starting point' (p 15) and, in its relation to ecclesiology, a place in 'the theological encyclopaedia' (p 22). Discussing 'ecumenical church polity in practice', he proposes that, alongside unilateral norms made by a church on ecumenism and joint norm-making in inter-church agreements, ecumenical partners could usefully develop 'a joint set of regulations in which the churches transfer specific competencies to ecumenical organizations, arbitration committees or other bodies' (p 37). Indeed, 'A church order first of all organizes local church life' but it 'is also presumed to orient local church life towards the universal aspects of the church' (p 42): ecumenical church polity 'becomes part of the church polity agenda' (ibid). Moreover, in an overview of episcopal, presbyterian and congregational forms of church governance, Koffeman suggests that: 'Each church polity system has to be challenged theologically, and each includes challenges to the other systems' (p 61); 'there is no "ideal" system' – 'the only option is a truly ecumenical approach' which recognises that 'each church polity system is necessarily provisional' (ibid), and that, crucially, 'Church law . . . is there in order to serve' the mission of the church (p 80).

Part II is on church polity and the foundation and nature of the church: liturgical church polity, the congregation and ordained ministry. It explores the Word of God as 'the foundation of the Church' (p 84), itself a 'communion of people that venture to live with this Word' (ibid); indeed, the Holy Spirit is 'to be recognized in what the different systems share', namely an 'epicletic church polity that has never been fully suppressed by the self-legitimizing and competing church polity systems of the second millennium' (p 85). Importantly, worship (a dialogue between minister and faithful which manifests the dialogue between God and the world) is the 'original seat' of church law (p 88): it is in worship that the congregation becomes what it is theologically (and it is to worship that church law was originally applied). Part II also proposes the need for church polity to balance the local autonomy of the congregation and denominational policy (Chapter 8), to address 'a (more) functional and a (more) sacramental . . . or "ontological" . . . view of ordained ministry' (p 119) and to ensure that ordained ministry should be exercised in a 'personal, collegial and communal way' (p 121) – criteria which are 'directly linked with the three main church polity systems' (p 126). Koffeman calls for 'a reconsideration of these criteria in all churches' (ibid).

Part III, on manifestations of the Church universal (the *una sancta*), is built on the need for a church 'to meet high moral standards in the way it operates' (p 131), the fear that 'people will have a profound mistrust of a church in which the power of church leaders cannot be regulated' (ibid), the fact that 'church polity is about structures and resources . . . conditions and limitations' (p 134) and the question 'how such limitations and conditions can be theologically legitimate' (ibid).

In light of the marks of the Church universal (one, holy, catholic and apostolic), Koffeman offers four criteria to measure the moral standards of church polity. First, *inclusivity*, the ‘goal of the church’: church polity should enable a church to ‘embrace all people’ (p 132), prohibit within it uniformity and discrimination (for example on the grounds of ethnicity or gender), protect legitimate diversity and promote diaconal activity beyond the church. Second, *authenticity*, the ‘source’ of the church, should be used to test whether church polity facilitates and protects the way in which a church ‘lives up to the Gospel’ (p 169). However, ‘no church order arrangements can guarantee the work of the Holy Spirit. They can never be more than facilitating instruments of authenticity’ (p 184); and ‘Church orders cannot safeguard the authenticity of a church, but they certainly have possibilities to at least enhance it’ (p 187), for example through rules on doctrinal discipline and rules on admission to ordained ministry which seek ‘to safeguard the authenticity of ordained ministry’ (p 188). Third, church polity should promote *conciliarity*: to let the gifts of each serve the vocation that all share (p 211); to connect the diverse and to ‘give a voice to those who participate in its communal life’ (p 191); and thereby to balance unity and diversity (because ‘Diversity is not a concession to unity, but rather a necessary aspect in the implementation of unity’ (p 192). Fourth, *integrity* refers to boundaries so that church polity ensures that ‘not everything goes within the church. The Gospel implies limitations’ (p 133). Meeting the highest standards of ethical behaviour from those with representative or ministerial responsibilities is essential to maintain integrity: ‘A church that tolerates injustice in its internal life, or that is not characterized by deep respect for human dignity in its external relationships, lacks all credibility’ (p 215). Koffeman explores this theme in discussion of the relationship between integrity and holiness, sin and morals, and the means used in church polity to address these, such as processes for oversight, visitation and discipline (Chapter 14).

Part IV is on church polity in context: ‘church law is shaped in a continuing interaction with culture, or rather with cultures’ (p 233); in other words: ‘Church polity is contextual by definition’ (ibid). The thrust of Part IV is that ecumenism should take into account the issue of church–state relations, which are ‘shaped by two legal systems at the same time’ (p 237), state law and church law. Koffeman here addresses religious freedom, the separation of church and state (with a Dutch case study, Chapter 15) and the need to test church polity against secular standards on human rights and their applicability within the church (Chapter 16). Throughout the book, his critical use of theory is deeply impressive; he relies heavily on the work of Hans Dombois, Edward Lang, Pieter Coertzen, Karl Barth, Rudolph Sohm and Hans Küng. WCC documents are also used throughout to provide ecclesiological propositions which are then discussed against the backdrop of church polity. There is a helpful and wide-ranging bibliography.

Three minor criticisms may be made of the book. First, it does not generally study the primary materials, the churches' regulatory instruments themselves. Fewer than a dozen are referred to, among which the (Books of) Church Order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa are prominent throughout. A study of the primary sources could have uncovered more extensive convergence between the churches of the various traditions by virtue of the detail contained in them. However, interestingly, of *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion*, launched at the Lambeth Conference 2008, Koffeman proposes that 'an analogous project in Reformed church polity would be worthwhile' (p 70). Second, the range of institutional churches studied could have been wider; the Roman Catholic Church is discussed in many chapters but, again, no systematic use is made of, for instance, Orthodox, Methodist, United or Baptist regulatory instruments. Third, Koffeman could have made more of the possibility that, while doctrines may divide Christians globally, church regulatory instruments link Christians in common norms of conduct and therefore in shared action. Indeed, he recognises that

In (nearly) every church the Word of God is being proclaimed, faith is being confessed, baptism and the Lord's Supper are being administered, wedding ceremonies and funerals are being attended, etc. This fact offers a beginning for conversations between different Christian traditions, including an exchange in terms of church polity. In practice, the differences are less divisive than presumed ... if only transcendental self-justification and legitimizing theology can be discarded. (p 85)

The absence of an index might also be worthy of critical comment.

This book is a landmark contribution not only to our understanding of the juridical dimension of ecclesial life but also to the value of church law/order/polity in the ecumenical enterprise. Leo Koffeman has therefore done ecumenism a great service: he facilitates exploration of the ways in which ecclesial regulatory instruments enable or restrict the development of greater visible communion between separated churches. It is also of immense value that he is a member of the Symposium that met in Rome in 2013, and is due to meet there in 2014, to explore how these conclusions might be fed into the ecumenical enterprise.

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