

David Burrowes MP reminded us dramatically that freedom of religion was not just a theoretical question. He explained the admirable work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Freedom and its important role in monitoring and speaking about the persecution of Christians. He concentrated on Pakistan but I could also speak of the north of Nigeria and Boko Haram. In spite of an impressive international legal architecture for religious freedom, there were increasing levels of persecution, especially of Christians – arguably now the most persecuted group. It was commented that even where there was theoretical religious freedom there were sometimes no sanctions against its infringement. I was particularly interested when David Burrowes turned to the home front and spoke not of religious persecution as such but of the effects of religious illiteracy among officials in relation to migration and asylum. I referred to the work of Nicholas Coulton and others in the Society in this regard.

The Society therefore enjoyed a rich but also questioning day. Are the days of supposed religious neutrality in law over? How does the law continue to define religion? What wisdom is there from international law and new cases? Meanwhile, what is happening to faith groups on the ground, not least Christians? The Committee, Will Adam and Andy Male are to be congratulated on a very stimulating day.

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## Law and Religion Scholars' Network: Cardiff Festival of Law and Religion

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The Law and Religion Scholars Network (LARSN) held its annual conference at Cardiff University on 5–6 May 2016. Approximately 125 scholars and students gathered in the Welsh capital for the event, with delegates coming from across the UK and from as far afield as Qatar, Canada and Australia. Cardiff proved worth the journey: delegates were met with blue skies, bright sunshine and a city in full bloom. The conference formed the core of the Cardiff Festival for Law and Religion, which marked the twentieth-fifth anniversary of the University's LLM in Canon Law.

In keeping with the festival's efforts to mark the growth of law and religion studies over the past two decades, plenary sessions held on Thursday and Friday morning focused on its theoretical and practical development. Thursday's session, 'Law and religion: leading works', gave contributors a chance to discuss those texts they deemed seminal in the emergence of the sub-discipline, including Kevin Boyle's 'Religious intolerance and the incitement of hatred' (as selected by Sylvie Bacquet), St John A Robilliard's *Religion and the Law* (as discussed by Prof Anthony Bradney), the European Convention on Human Rights (as chosen by Frank Cranmer) and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Dr Celia Kenny's nomination).<sup>1</sup> This session heralded the forthcoming edited volume *Law and Religion: leading works* (edited by Drs Celia Kenny and Russell Sandberg), due to be published as part of the ICLARS–Routledge Series on Law and Religion in 2018. Friday's plenary, 'Meet the Editors and Bloggers', offered insights from the editors of the *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* (Dr Will Adam), the *Oxford Journal for Law and Religion* (Prof Julian Rivers, standing in for Dr Peter Petkoff) and *Law and Justice* (John Duddington), as well as Frank Cranmer and David Pocklington of the popular scholarly blog *Law & Religion UK* ([www.lawandreligionuk.com](http://www.lawandreligionuk.com)).

As with previous LARSN events, conference panels were convened around a range of disciplinary perspectives. While space forbids a comprehensive review of the fifty papers presented, the following brief overview suggests the theoretical and methodological diversity showcased by the members. Thursday's panel on 'Religion and freedom of expression', for example, saw calls for both the continued tolerance of offensive speech (Dr Erica Howard, 'Geert Wilders: freedom of speech or gratuitously offensive to believers?') and the creation of a religious hatred law (Prof Peter Edge, 'The problem with religious hate law'), while the panel on 'Current issues in law and religion' saw exploratory, policy-oriented and empirical approaches from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, legal studies and social anthropology (Dr David Perfect, 'The ECHR's evaluation of the religion or belief legal framework'; Clemens Steinhilber, 'Preventing religious fundamentalism through an academic formation of religious elites'; Méadhbh McIvor, "'Do Christians have rights?'" Conservative evangelical responses to Christian legal activism'). Legal analyses focused on the European Court of Human Rights' freedom of religion case load (Prof Dr Sophie van Bijsterveld, 'Hard cases: what divides the ECtHR in religion cases?'; Caroline Roberts, 'Is there a right to be "free from" religion under Article 9 of the ECHR?'), while theoretical papers questioned the conceptual work done by the category of 'religion' in law (Prof Dr Richard Amesbury, 'Who has a religion?').

1 K Boyle, 'Religious intolerance and the incitement of hatred', in S Coliver (ed), *Striking a Balance: hate speech, freedom of expression and non-discrimination* (London, 1992); St J Robilliard, *Religion and the Law* (Manchester, 1984); C Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

Islam in the liberal imagination'; Dr Hans-Martien ten Napel, 'The "new critics of religious freedom" and the inspiration they unintentionally provide').

The festival also celebrated the work of Cardiff Law School's Professor Norman Doe, founder and Director of the University's Centre for Law and Religion, and his ongoing contribution to this burgeoning field of study. Friday afternoon saw the launch of *The Confluence of Law and Religion: interdisciplinary reflections on the work of Norman Doe*.<sup>2</sup> The editors, Frank Cranmer, Mark Hill, Celia Kenny and Russell Sandberg, gave moving tributes to Professor Doe, who was well feted by the many students and colleagues gathered in his honour.

Friday afternoon's plenary speech was given by Professor David Little, the retired TJ Dermot Dunphy Professor of the Practice in Religion, Ethnicity, and International Conflict at Harvard Divinity School and a current fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, who spoke on 'Human rights, religious freedom and peace'. Professor Little offered a spirited defence of the pursuit of rights-based justice in the modern world, arguing that 'there is strong empirical support for the proposition that human rights compliance in general, and religious freedom compliance in particular, expand the prospects for peace'. Taking as his point of departure the critiques of human rights discourse offered by the anthropologist Talal Asad and by religious studies scholars such as Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, who have challenged both the discriminatory ways in which this discourse is deployed in international law and the implicitly Protestant assumptions underlying the kind of 'religion' most likely to be recognised by the liberal state, Professor Little suggested that these arguments do little to undermine the idea that the legal protection of human rights contributes to peace both 'within and among nations'.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not one accepts Professor Little's critique of rights critics – and the author of this report is one of those who agrees with Asad when he suggests that scholars of human rights cannot ignore the moral inconsistency that often accompanies their exportation, including the rhetorical sleight of hand that justifies the mass violence perpetrated by liberal democracies as 'collateral damage' rather than as a violation of the 'human rights' that they chastise foreign 'others' for failing to uphold – the pursuit of peace is surely something we can all support.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, Professor Little's address encompassed the best of law and religion studies: an engagement with critical theory, an account of the

2 F Cranmer, M Hill, C Kenny and R Sandberg (eds), *The Confluence of Law and Religion: interdisciplinary reflections on the work of Norman Doe* (Cambridge, 2016).

3 T Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity* (Stanford, CA, 2003); W Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ, 2005); E Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: the new global politics of religion* (Princeton, NJ, 2015).

4 Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p 128.

situation as it stands and an enthusiastic appeal for governments, policy-makers and scholars to live up to our highest ideals.

The next LARSN conference will take place in Cardiff in May 2018 and will celebrate ten years since the launch of the Network. Enquiries can be made to Dr Russell Sandberg at [sandbergr@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:sandbergr@cardiff.ac.uk).

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