(2025) 27 Ecc LJ 149–151
doi:10.1017/S0956618X25000249

Ecclesiastical Law Society
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

EDITORIAL

Editorial

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Proceedings of the Colloquium of Anglican and Catholic Canon Lawyers are regularly reported in this *Journal*. The Colloquium plays an important role in providing a forum for Anglican and Roman Catholic canonists to meet and discuss aspects of canon law, comparing the approaches of their respective traditions.[1] In recent years, I have been pleased to publish reports from meetings of the Colloquium which have included sets of agreed principles on matters such as 'penal law and church discipline'[2] and 'ordained ministry: rights and duties'.[3]

The Colloquium's deliberations in 2024[4] resulted in an agreed statement of principles of 'canon law and synodality'. All the articles in this issue of the *Journal* are revised versions of papers circulated in advance and rigorously interrogated during the Colloquium in a search for shared principles. In total, the meeting in 2024 formulated 20 agreed principles of canon law and synodality, split into five sections, which are common to both the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. The preamble to the Colloquium's agreed statement of principles defines 'synodality' as:[5]

> the process by which Christians gather to dialogue, to discern and to make and at times take decisions.

Turning, then, to the articles in this issue. Professor Norman Doe KC (Hon) sets the scene with an analysis of the role canon law plays in fostering ecumenical consensus. This process can be seen in the development of the *Statement of Principles of Christian*

[1] For an explanation of the history and methodology of the Colloquium, see 'A decade of ecumenical dialogue on canon law' (2009) 11 Ecc LJ 284–328.

[2] S Hughes Carew and B Earl, 'Colloquium of Anglican and Roman Catholic canon lawyers' (2023) 25 Ecc LJ 257–259.

[3] L Beckett and C Wright, 'Colloquium of Anglican and Roman Catholic canon lawyers' (2024) 26 Ecc LJ 332–334.

[4] A summary of which is reported in a previous issue of this *Journal*: N Doe and R Ombres, 'The Twenty-Third Colloquium of Anglican and Roman Catholic canon lawyers: canon law and synodality' (2025) 27 Ecc LJ 116–120.

[5] Ibid, 119.

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Law back in 2016.[6] This *Statement of Principles* was the result of an ecumenical panel of experts in church law who – through comparative, empirical examination of the internal regulations of their respective churches – were able to articulate a common set of legal principles as they apply across Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches.[7] Professor Doe concludes that:[8]

> From the *Statement of Principles*, and the laws it is based on, I suggest, emerge principles of synodality around which all Christians today can meet – about the types and levels of church assembly, their composition, functions, and processes. From juridical ecumenism, we see that the principle of synodality is of the *essence* of church governance. The laws of all the churches provide the evidence of this.
>
> But can juridical ecumenism, for greater Christian unity, find still more precise candidate principles of synodality than those already implicit in the *Statement*?

The articles which follow Professor Doe's contribution seek to answer that question. They form pairs and drill down into the detail of how synodality manifests itself at each synodical 'level' from an Anglican and Roman Catholic perspective: Russell Dewhurst and Andrew Cole examine the *universal* level; Edward Dobson and Luke Beckett examine the *regional* level; Mark Hill KC and Helen Costigane examine the *local* (diocesan) level; and Morag Ellis KC and Robert Ombres OP examine the *parochial* (parish) level. The final two contributions, from Stephen Coleman and Benjamin Earl, shift focus and examine the different *individuals* who make up ecclesial life – bishops, (other) clergy, and the laity – and how they each interact with the processes and structures that surround the concept of synodality.

The final set of shared principles agreed by the Colloquium on canon law and synodality, which represent the culmination of this process, can be found in the January 2025 issue of this *Journal*.[9]

I wish to put on record my thanks to Luke Beckett for his assistance in marshalling all these contributions which are published simultaneously in the *Canon Law Newsletter* of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, ensuring that this research reaches the widest possible audience, and as a tangible gesture of receptive ecumenism.

The issue of synodality is topical for two reasons. First, the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church concluded in October 2024. Known as 'the Synod on Synodality', its theme was a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.[10] Secondly, 2025 marks the 1700th anniversary of the first

[6] The *Statement of Principles* can be found in N Doe (ed), *Church Laws and Ecumenism: A New Path for Christian Unity* (Oxford, 2021), 270, Appendix II. See also M Hill and N Doe 'Principles of Christian law' (2017) Ecc LJ 138–155.

[7] This project itself drew on the pioneering work of Professor Doe in *Christian Law: Contemporary Principles* (Cambridge, 2013).

[8] N Doe, 'Canon law, ecumenism and synodality' (2025) 27 Ecc LJ 152–169, at 169. Emphasis in original.

[9] Doe and Ombres (note 4), 119–120.

[10] cf. Ibid, at 116.

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Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. Nicaea left its mark indelibly on the centuries that followed, not least in canons – a species of legislation pioneered at Nicaea – and in the involvement of the Emperor, and the secular powers. In June 2025, a conference of the Ecclesiastical Law Society – 'Nicaea Received: 1700 years of Canons, Councils and Ecumenism' – will convene at Chichester Cathedral to examine these issues further and hear keynote addresses from His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, Professor Myriam Wijlens (Professor of Canon Law at the University of Erfurt), and the Rt Rev'd Dr Christopher Cocksworth (Dean of Windsor) amongst other eminent scholars. This conference will offer another watershed moment in the resurgence of interest in ecclesiastical law and its capacity to galvanise meaningful ecumenical discussions in order to bring the scattered universal Church closer together.

Cite this article: B Harrison, 'Editorial' (2025) 27 Ecc LJ 149–151. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956618X25000249

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