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Editorial

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This issue of the *Journal* contains a collection of articles and comment pieces based on lectures delivered at Chichester Cathedral in June 2025 as part of the Ecclesiastical Law Society's conference: *Nicaea Received: 1700 Years of Canons, Councils, and Ecumenism*. This event was a significant occasion in the life of the Church, and brought together senior clergy, lawyers and theologians from all over the world – with representatives from the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic church, the Coptic and Greek Orthodox church, the Methodist church, and the Church of Sweden – who were able to join together in research, fellowship and collective worship.[1] The common aim was to identify how aspects of our shared ecclesiology can be traced back to the resolutions of that first great ecumenical council in Nicaea.

The council of Nicaea was convened by Emperor Constantine in 324 AD. Constantine sponsored the council primarily to solve a dispute sparked in the Church of Alexandria concerning the nature and significance of Christ. Diarmaid MacCulloch explains that it was Constantine

> who proposed a most significant clause in the creed which emerged as the council's agreed pronouncement: the statement that the Son was 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) with the Father. Faced with the awe-inspiring presence of the emperor of the known world, there could be little opposition to this: only two bishops are recorded as standing out against it. A large accumulation of other matters controversial in the life of the Church were discussed at this council. They included precedence among the leading bishops, a prohibition on moneylending among the clergy and overhasty promotion of recent converts to the episcopate, the reconciliation of schismatics, even a ban on voluntary eunuchs being ordained as clergy. There was much for subsequent ecclesiastical lawyers to pour over and argue about.[2]

This issue of the *Journal* is a further example of, and contribution to, that ongoing debate.

[1] The participants included His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Archbishop of York, the Archbishop of Birmingham, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Great Britain, and the Director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office.

[2] D MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London, 2010), 214.

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It is a privilege to be able to publish an article by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in which he considers the relevance of the canons of Nicaea to the living canonical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. His contribution is timely in reminding us that, far from being the irrelevant product of a by-gone age, the drafters of the Nicene canons intended that 'anchored in the faith, [they] should be used by the Church in every generation to confront new problems that the Church might face'.[3]

Next, Professor Norman Doe KC (Hon) compares the differences and similarities between the Nicene canons with the 2016 *Statement of Principles of Christian Law.*[4] Significantly, Doe reminds us of certain events in September 2019 which had particular importance for the field of juridical ecumenism – the study of church law as a form of applied ecclesiology. The Ecumenical Patriarch publicly acknowledged how the *Statement of Principles of Christian Law* 'is designed to fill the historical *canonical deficit* in the ecumenical enterprise'. Shortly afterwards, the late Pope Francis pronounced that Church law 'is not only an aid to ecumenical dialogue, but also an *essential dimension*' to it.[5] It was in this spirit of receptive ecumenism that the Ecclesiastical Law Society's conference in Chichester was convened last year.

Turning to the Church of England, Bishop Christopher Hill compares and contrasts the Nicene canons with the current canons of the Church of England, noting in particular how the contemporary canons share much with their Nicene counterparts when it comes to their treatment of metropolitical jurisdiction.[6] Morag Ellis KC delves deeper into the Nicene canons from the perspective of clergy discipline, assessing their ongoing relevance to our handling of clergy disciplinary matters today.[7] Ellis' article foreshadows the coming into force of the new Clergy Conduct Measure. The new Measure had been expected to come into force later this year. However, that is now doubtful given the decision of the Joint Ecclesiastical Committee of both Houses of Parliament to find the Measure 'not expedient' due to concerns that (on the current proposals) tribunal hearings will continue to be held in private by default.[8]

The next theme explored is the nature of synodical authority. Professor Alison Milbank examines the Church of England's modern governance structures. She argues how 'a loss of the hierarchical dimension has made us less not more

[3] His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 'The Canons of Nicaea as Part of the Living Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 5–13, at 5.

[4] See further N Doe (ed), *Church Laws and Ecumenism: A New Path for Christian Unity* (Oxford, 2021) and M Hill and N Doe, 'Principles of Christian Law' (2017) 19 Ecc LJ 138–155.

[5] Compare N Doe, 'Juridical Ecumenism and the Canons of Nicaea: Comparing the Nicene Canons (325) and the *Statement of Principles of Christian Law* (2016)' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 14–32, at 18. Emphasis added.

[6] C Hill, 'The Canons of Nicaea and the Canon Law of the Church of England' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 33–44.

[7] M Ellis, 'The Relevance of the Nicene Canons for Clergy Discipline: Past, Present and Future' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 45–64.

[8] 'Clergy Conduct Batted Back to General Synod', *The Church Times*, 31 October 2025, which can be accessed here: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2025/31-october/news/uk/clergy-conduct-batted-back-to-general-synod (accessed 8 December 2025).

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participatory and encouraged more centralised and secular modes of authority' in the church.[9] Drawing on the example set by the Council of Nicaea, Milbank calls for a renewal of a Dionysian understanding of hierarchy, and a return to the principle of subsidiarity. The Reverend Gerry Lynch examines the institutions that have unified Anglicanism internationally throughout its history, with a particular focus on Lambeth Conferences and the patriarchal nature of the authority exercised by the Archbishop of Canterbury.[10] In the comment section, the Reverend Neil Patterson considers the opening years of the Church Assembly (the precursor to the modern General Synod) and Archbishop Bernard Longley considers the enduring impact of the Council of Nicaea from the perspective of the Roman Catholic church's approach to ecumenical relations post-Vatican II.

Next, Bishop Christopher Cocksworth looks in more detail at the role Constantine played at the Council of Nicaea and, more broadly, the contribution Roman Emperors made to the unity and peace of the Church and of society. He uses this as a counterpoint to assess the close association between Monarch, Church and State in British history, recognising that the King's '*religious identity* gives to the Monarch a constitutional freedom and authority to draw on Christian narrative at pivotal moments of national life'.[11] Professor Mark Edwards considers the origin and controversies surrounding the Nicene Creed and discusses its limitations as a statement of faith.[12]

In addition to the usual Parliamentary report, case notes and book reviews, Morag Ellis KC provides us with a fitting tribute to Sheila Cameron CBE KC, the former Dean and Auditor, who sadly died last year.

With space being at a premium in this issue of the *Journal*, the usual collection of Synod reports will appear in the May 2026 issue. The eighth instalment in the *Rediscovering Anglican Priest-Jurists* series, co-authored by Professor Doe and the Reverend George Bush (on Thomas Sherlock (1678–1761)), and a further article from Professor Doe (providing us with a detailed exposition of the – hitherto neglected – York *Provinciale*) can be accessed online using First View.[13] Both will appear in print in May 2026.

Finally, readers will note that Russell Dewhurst has passed on the reigns of Book Review editor to Edward Day. I am sure all readers will join me in wishing Russell all the best as he takes up his new appointment as the Archdeacon of Hastings and continues his PhD research. Russell's time as Book Review editor for the past three years has been marked by his diligence and efficiency. I thank him for all his work in developing the Book Review section of the *Journal*, and I am pleased to report that he will continue to serve on the *Journal*'s editorial board. The Society is indebted to Edward for agreeing to take up the role, and to Frank Cranmer, Simon Stanley and

[9] A Milbank, 'Conciliarity and Dispersed Authority from Nicaea to the Archbishops' Council' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 65–80.

[10] G Lynch, 'Discovering Anglicanism – Ecclesiology at Lambeth Conferences 1867–1998' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 81–95.

[11] C Cocksworth, 'The Monarch, the Common Witness of the Church, and the Godly Constitution of the State' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 96–105, at 101. Emphasis added.

[12] M Edwards, 'What did the Nicene Creed say?' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 106–116.

[13] https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ecclesiastical-law-journal/firstview.

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Chancellor David Willink who all continue to offer their time, energy and skills in editing their respective sub-sections of the *Journal*.

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