

Gospel & Law

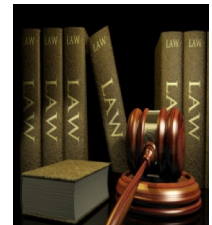
Advent Edition

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Welcome to another edition of Gospel and Law as we approach Advent and review this November meeting of the General Synod. Legal developments this month include street preaching, heckling and public order, Judicial pronouncements on religion and law and congratulations to the winners of the Society's Eric Kemp Prizes for students. Plus, as usual more details of events, conferences and courses... Enjoy a happy and holy Advent.

And just to clarify what Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division said about law and religion... Religious belief "can never of itself immunise the believer from the reach of the secular law". He was shortly afterwards given support by the new Lord Chief Justice himself, Lord Thomas who, in his first **press conference** since taking office he told journalists:

"We are a court where we have to apply the law and the law is essentially a secular law and as it is our duty to apply law which is secular law we should do that".

General Synod November 2013:

There seemed to be a good deal on the agenda that concerned vision and context, including the debate on Intentional Evangelism. One word of caution arising from the Church Times headline 'Talk about Jesus, not the weather' is the need to observe appropriate professional boundaries when dealing with clients and particularly vulnerable clients in the context of professional practice. Synod approved the setting up of a Task Group on Evangelism.

Whilst the proposals for new legislation on the possibility of consecrating women Bishops were welcomed (of which more details below), the London diocesan synod motion to review the workings of Synod in favour of something less Parliamentary failed. An extensive Miscellaneous Provisions Measure received final approval and a new Measure, intended to streamline the Faculty Jurisdiction further, was introduced of which no doubt there will be clarification by the Dean of the Arches in his January London Lecture for the Society (see below).

The debate on education considered the implications of increased responsibility for education providers, including the Churches, as opposed to the Local Education Authority. The Motion passed urged dioceses to complete their self-evaluations within 12 months in accordance with 'A DBE for the Future' and to plan the widest possible use of the new *Christianity Project* materials in church and other schools. An amendment was carried to encourage identification and implementation of good practice in strengthening church and school ties as well as more schools oriented training for lay and ordained ministers. The Archbishops' Council was invited to report to Synod by February on national governance following the Chadwick Report.

Last, but by no means least, in his valedictory to Bishop Christopher the Archbishop of Canterbury reported that he had awarded the society's Chairman a well-deserved Lambeth DD.

So what was it that Synod voted so overwhelmingly in favour of concerning women Bishops? Here's an attempt at summarising the proposals:

The package has four elements, only the first two of which are legislative – the Measure and the Amending Canon, which will change the law so that women can become Bishops. The **Measure** is simple (only four clauses long). The **Amending Canon** is also simple, making new, non-gender specific provision for the ordination of deacons, priests and bishops (subject to retaining special provision for the ordination of deaconesses.) It also requires the House of Bishops to make regulations prescribing a procedure for resolving disputes arising out of the third element in the package – the **House of Bishops Declaration**.

The Declaration incorporates the five 'guiding principles' agreed by the House last May, which are in a way the cornerstone of the package (which is why the Synod was asked explicitly to welcome them). A PCC will be able to pass a resolution requesting that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the Declaration.

The final element in the package is the mandatory **disputes resolution procedure**, which establishes the role of the 'independent reviewer', whose responsibilities are modelled on the ombudsman type schemes that operate in Whitehall and elsewhere. PCCs will be able to approach the reviewer if they believe that the Bishop has not responded to their resolution in a way that is accordance with the commitments of the House in its Declaration. The reviewer would also have the ability to look at wider concerns about the operation of the Declaration. But the reviewer's real power comes from being able to investigate and publish findings: the process is not in itself a disciplinary one.

Meantime, on a lighter note, in Philadelphia there is some confusion about what and who is disorderly. What was described by campaigners as "a great night lifting up Jesus on South Street [a red light district], with many tracts going out and... declaring God's word," was cut short by complaints from the owner of a local 'Cheesesteak' restaurant. The police arrived to move them on and found a bit of a crowd from which a young woman emerged and bared her breasts. The preacher complained that she was disorderly but found himself in the minority and being arrested on a public order charge to avoid further complaints! The charge has since been dropped as being without foundation.

Congratulations to the winners of this year's Eric Kemp Prizes for the best essays from students of Ecclesiastical Law, who are:

From Cardiff Amanda Mei Xian Choong.

From Oxford Brookes Course 'Law and Religion in the 21st Century', Miss Joanna Tilley.

And from the new course at Durham Niall B Crean, St Cuthbert's College.

And News of Events to Come:

Day Conference & AGM 2014 – *Safeguarding* – 5th April 2014 at the Cardinal Vaughan Centre, Westminster – cost £35 members or £70 for non-members.

Speakers include:

Bill Jacob, Archdeacon of Charing Cross,
Elizabeth Hall, National Safeguarding Adviser to the Archbishop's Council,
Nicola Harding Joint Registrar Ripon and Leeds and
Adrian Iles, Designated Officer under the Clergy Discipline Measure.

The Conference will include updates on good practice as well as proposed developments in Church law on the matter in the light of recent enquiries in Winchester and Chichester Dioceses.

The Biennial Residential Conference will be held in April 2015 in Bristol. Its focus on the Funeral Project, exhumations, memorials and other grave cases will make it dead exciting.... And it is anticipated that committee meetings between now and then will be dominated by appalling puns around death... The conference will also be the final conference presided over by Bishop Christopher as our Chairman...

London Lectures: To be held at Winkworth Sherwood, Montague Street Southwark at 5pm

29th January 2014 – Charles George, Dean of the Arches on the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013

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