

**Nicaea Received: 1700 years of Canons, Councils and Ecumenism  
20th to 22nd June 2025 at Chichester Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace**

**Conference Programme** (version 11 January 2025)

Please note that further details will be added to this programme nearer the Conference date. We do not expect significant changes, but they may be necessary. A final programme will be issued in due course.

In each set of 'Seminars' in the programme, three seminars take place simultaneously and participants are asked to indicate their planned attendance in the participant information form sent to them upon registering.

**Friday 20 June 2025**

- 1100 Registration open between 11am and 12.30pm.
- 1230 Lunch
- 1400 Seminars

**(1) What changed after Nicaea?**

*Professor Mark Edwards, Professor of Early Christian Studies, University of Oxford*

While the Nicene Symbol of 325 is commonly regarded as a definitive statement of Christian faith in the triune God, it left a great deal undecided. Not only, for example, does it fail to enunciate any doctrine of the Holy Spirit: it did not determine whether the Son can be said to be created, and did not say expressly that the Son and the Father are one God. Even the supplementary clauses introduced in 381 do not produce a doctrine of one God in three persons. For that we must look to the consensus of those who were recognised as Fathers; the notion of conciliar theology leaves us well short of what we would now regard as orthodoxy.

**(2) 'The summits of venerable law...the reins through which the clergy are guided in a just manner' – A Discussion of the Relevance of the Nicæan Canons for Clergy Discipline, Past, Present and Future.**

*The Rt Worshipful Morag Ellis KC, Dean of Arches and Auditor*

In addition to the well-known Creeds, the Council of Nicaea produced 20 Canons covering admission, discipline and hierarchy of clergy and ecclesiastical organisation and polity. As products of their time, the Canons and their reception in the Eastern and Western Church are of historical interest, but do they continue to resonate and influence clergy discipline today? This paper seeks to answer that question and to assess the Canons' long reception and contribution in an ecumenical context.

**(3) Conciliarity and Dispersed Authority from Nicaea to the Archbishops' Council**

*The Revd Professor Alison Milbank, Canon Theologian of Southwell and Professor of Theology and Literature at the University of Nottingham*

Although the Council of Nicaea was the first attempt at a world-wide council of the whole Church to determine doctrine, this conciliarity was balanced by canons which confirmed the dispersed authority of the local churches and provinces. Primarily a meeting of bishops, it also included deacons and presbyters, and was, of course, convened by a layman, Constantine, who sat among the bishops. To that extent, it bore out Cyprian's earlier episcopal practice, 'to do nothing ... without [presbyters' and deacons'] advice and without the consent of the people'. This paper examines the tension between centralized and dispersed authority in the fourth century and in today's Church of England, examining how far Anglican governance has strayed from the principle of subsidiarity and from Hooker's conciliar ecclesiology.

1530 **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

*Professor Myriam Wijlens, Professor of Canon Law at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Erfurt*

Tea

1730 Choral Evensong

1930 Dinner

**Saturday 21 June 2025**

0800 Holy Eucharist

0830 Morning Prayer

1000 Seminars

**(1) Juridical Ecumenism and the Canons of Nicaea**

*Professor Norman Doe KC, Professor of Law, Cardiff University*

This talk addresses three matters. First, how institutional churches within the global Christian family have laws or other regulatory instruments: their forms, purposes, and subject-matter. Second, the comparative church law work which resulted in the issue in the *Statement of Principles of Christian Law* (2016) launched at the World Council of Churches' 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly 2022, and welcomed by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as a form of 'juridical ecumenism' to address the 'canonical deficit' in ecumenical dialogue to-date. Third, the extent to which, if at all, this *Statement* echoes ideas in the Canons of the Council of Nicaea in such areas as ministry, liturgy, and governance.

**(2) The Twenty Canons of Nicaea**

The Rt Revd Christopher Hill, President of the Ecclesiastical Law Society

The council of Nicaea is rightly famed for the addition of *homoousios*/consubstantial/of identical essence to the Creed. It also passed twenty canons. Why and what happened to them? Canons were not the invention of Nicaea, earlier provincial councils so acted, but their status remained provincial. Because Nicaea was an Ecumenical Council the miscellaneous Nicæan Canons came to possess a certain primacy. But like other canons they addressed *ad hoc* questions some of which we will examine and ask how they were observed or otherwise and what relevance some of them still have, for example, in the Church of England.

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1100 Coffee

1130 Seminars

**(1) PANEL: Nicene Christianity and Ecumenism Today**

*Chaired by the Rt Revd Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham and Chair of the Council for Christian Unity*

## (2) **Discovering Anglicanism — Ecclesiology at Lambeth Conferences 1867-1998**

*The Revd Gerry Lynch, doctoral student, University of Oxford*

Anglicanism emerged by accident, having resisted many attempts at being defined. This paper will explore how bishops gradually created an Anglican ecclesiology at Lambeth Conferences from 1867, often through testing the limits of acceptability, and then offer some explanations for why the Anglican capacity to marry theological diversity with hierarchy and the historic episcopate seems to have broken down irreparably since the last years of the 20th century.

## (3) **Members' papers – Councils and Canons**

### i) 'The Inevitability of a Parliamentary Model?'

*The Revd Canon Neil Patterson, Vice-Dean of Bristol*

This paper explores the opening years of the National Assembly of the Church of England (called the Church Assembly from 1924) from its inauguration in 1920 until 1926. Beginning as the fulfilment of a range of competing aspirations, the Assembly was unlikely to satisfy all. I contend that although many significant voices were clear that they sought it to be something different from Parliament, the procedural necessities of running a large assembly, particularly in passing legislation, meant that the structure inevitably operated like a democratic parliament, as has continued into General Synod since 1970. Additional factors are the presence of clear church parties, as in the wider Church since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and of experienced parliamentarians with expectations of procedure, in the Assembly. I will also identify some of the key personalities in the early Assembly and comment on their role in its development, such as Archbishop Davidson and Lord Hugh Cecil.

### ii) 'The limited relevance of canons in England'

*Dr Augur Pearce*

The English Reformation's emancipation of the laity had implications for the 'laws of foreign prelates' and for the canons of provincial convocations. The former's force in England was attributed to popular acceptance; the latter bound - *proprio vigore* - only the clergy. *Middleton v. Crofts* ended one phase of resistance to this reasoning: the second phase continues. Arguments for a distinct, clerocratic 'law of the church' were discernible in the ritual controversy, affinity law reform, the constitution of the Church Assembly, and the work of several Archbishops' Commissions. Yet the 1947-69 canonical revision project retreated from such arguments, apparently accepting the essentially unitary character of English law. Since then some canons have gained a function as delegated legislation. These questions bear on the current canonical definition of marriage, raising the issues of canons affecting the laity indirectly, and of temporal rights in which canons do not even bind the clergy.

1300 Lunch

### 1415 **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

The Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Dean of Windsor

Break

### 1545 **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

His All Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

1730 Choral Evensong

1930 Drinks Reception

2000 Conference Dinner

## **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025**

0930 Seminars

### (1) **PANEL: Canon Law and the Future of Nicene Christianity**

**(2) What changed after Nicaea?**

*Professor Mark Edwards, Professor of Early Christian Studies, University of Oxford*

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1115 Sung Eucharist

1300 **Closing Reflections**

*The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner, Bishop of Chichester, Vice-chair of the Ecclesiastical Law Society*

*The Rt Revd Christopher Hill, President of the Ecclesiastical Law Society*

1330 Lunch