

in April 2005, to discuss papers on ministry and the validity of orders. This promises to be an important event and it is hoped to submit an agreed statement on the canonical dimensions of the mutual recognition of orders to IARCCUM. Proceedings of the recent colloquia at Rome and Cardiff are due to be published shortly.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: TRANSITION AND GLOBALISATION

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In the year 988 Prince Vladimir dramatically baptised his entire nation in the Dnepr River, thereby establishing a new state religion in what is now Ukraine. Fittingly, Kiev (or Kyiv to adopt the Ukrainian spelling) played host in May to a conference on 'Religious Freedom: Transition and Globalisation'. Convened by the State Committee for Religious Affairs, the conference brought together academics from Western Europe and the USA with civil servants from the emergent democracies of the former USSR. Participant institutions included the International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, the International Religious Liberty Association, Brigham Young University, and the Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religion.

Events such as these serve to demonstrate the universality of human rights, albeit differently articulated and unevenly enforced. It is particularly noticeable in the area of freedom of religion. There are various reasons for this. The concept of public protection for private conscience and belief is challenging for state legislatures. Most liberal democracies regulate religion with the lightest of touches by both the executive and the judiciary.

Individual states have bought into international instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, treaties such as these allow considerable latitude to national governments and the Strasbourg court has traditionally offered a broad margin of appreciation in the implementation of Convention rights. States are generally reluctant to be prescriptive in applying freedom of religion among the comity of nations. But not so the USA, which in 1999 established the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. It is an independent federal government agency created by the International Religious Freedom Act 1998. Its purpose is to monitor religious freedom in other countries and to advise the American President.

Secretary of State and Congress on how best to promote it. It claims to be the first government commission in the world with a mandate to review and report on violations of the internationally-guaranteed right to freedom of religion and belief worldwide. In May 2004 the Commission published its latest annual report.<sup>1</sup>

Under the broad theme of Transition and Globalisation, the conference was divided into several plenary and concurrent sessions covering specific subjects as broad as the Role of Religion in Public Life in the Contemporary World, Universal Protections and Individual Identity, Issues Facing Minority Religions, Religious Freedom and its Legislative Guarantees in the Countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, OSCE Guidelines for Reviewing Legislation, Religious Freedom in the Caucasus, and Extremism and Fundamentalism in a Globalising World. The experience of the emergent democracies in Eastern Europe proved particularly instructive, with government departments taking an active part in promoting religious tolerance and promoting the well-being of minority religions. Societal and governmental conditions vary greatly and the continued monitoring of religious freedom will be a fruitful area of study in the years ahead.

<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion see M Hill 'Isn't religion a human right?' in (2004) *Church Times*, 16 July.