

Opening of Law Term Address Parramatta 2006

Delivered by His Honour Justice Peter Young QC, President Lawyers Christian Fellowship at St Johns Anglican Church, Parramatta .

When I was in year 4 at school, one of the things I dreaded was having to write an essay on a subject of my own choice. I could, and still can, write something on most subjects without difficulty. However choosing what to write about would cost me hours of preparation time.

Bishop Ivan when inviting me to speak this morning told me that I could choose the subject. The old dread returned.

Today is January 30. In the 1662 Anglican Prayer Book today is the feast day of the Blessed St Charles, who died to preserve the Anglican Church. Some of you might know him best as King Charles 1 who was beheaded on this day in 1649. (The 1662 Prayer Book was, of course, issued by the authority of Charles' son, Charles II.) However, this is an ecumenical service and not even most Anglican's today could honestly say that Charles 1 died for his belief in the Anglican Church let alone the Catholics and Protestants present.

Then I could give a few time honoured clichés about what wonderful people lawyers are. This would go over well, but would be of little value.

Then I thought that Bishop Ivan would expect me to say something about the gospel.

Then I realized that, without fudging I could give a gospel message, speak about wonderful lawyers and; perhaps, throw in a little bit about King Charles as well.

To start off, a bit of trivia. Did you know that the Bradshaw who wrote the book you all have in your libraries and read daily, Bradshaw on Charitable Trusts, was written by a direct descendant of the presiding judge at Charles 1st's trial?

I take as my text part of our second lesson this morning from the letter to Titus ch 3 verse 13, which, so far as is material for this morning, reads, “Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer”. (It is one of my favourite verses of scripture, though one seldom preached on by the professional clergy.)

We know virtually nothing about Zenas. However, he is the only lawyer commended in Scripture. It is probably correct to say that he is the only lawyer mentioned in Scripture. There are references to bad lawyers and scribes, but, if one looks closely, these people were actually clergy!

We can glean from the verse that Zenas must have been well known to the leaders of the church and was about to go on a mission with Apollos. However, that’s about as far as we can go. The commentators reckon he was a Greek convert (Zenas is short for Zenodoras (gift of Zeus) and he and Apollos were about to pass through Crete, where Titus was stationed, to some missionary destination..

It is comforting that right from the beginning of the church lawyers are there in leadership roles, being involved in the church’s mission not just in administration. This is a role that lawyers have adopted through the ages and still is the case today. Lawyers should be and I’m pleased to say, often are, the mainstay of churches of almost all descriptions.

I look at the lawyers of my generation. People like the chap who is now a Federal Court Judge, who was a churchwarden at Manly and in addition to his normal church activities spent many a Sunday night rounding up errant kids from the East and West of Sydney and seeing they got home. I am sure that many lawyers of Generation X or Y or what have you are doing similar things today.

Lawyers have the skills to play a vital part in the life of any congregation. They have people skills, verbal skills and knowledge of the world, and put those skills to the Lord’s service.

Now I realize that I am speaking to a group of people who would fall into one of three basic categories. I would term these categories, Potential Christians, Plateaued Christians and Active Christians.

First there are the Potential Christians. I don't like the terms 'pagans' or 'heathens' or even 'unbelievers' used by some clergy for this group. The Lord in his mercy will call into His kingdom many who today actively reject the gospel. David McCall, the Anglican Bishop of Bunbury, told me that when he was a young clergyman and visited a particular hospital ward, a man in bed would yell at him, "Keep away from me, Holy Man, I want none of your nonsense". Within a month, David had led him to Christ. Message to those in this category, If the Lord wants you, He'll get you"

The Plateaued Christian is the person who has found Christ as their Lord and Saviour and may even attend church regularly. They feel that with their own salvation secured and attending a church service in which the leaders do the work and leave the congregation with a happy and righteous feeling they are doing living the Christian life to the full. That's where they stop.

The great missionary, CT Studd parodied the this group in a bit of doggerel
"Some want to live within the sound
Of church and chapel bell:
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell."

The third group, the active Christian realizes that, although he or she has been saved from eternal death by the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, God wants His people to fulfil the petitions of the Lord's prayer.

We prayed it this morning, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as in Heaven". Don't think of the Kingdom as a place, but rather as a state of affairs in which God Rules. In the Lord's Prayer we are asking for God's will to be done so that it would be seen that God rules on Earth.

Thus, we who are Christians should ask ourselves before we do anything, “Is this what God wants me to do?” However, this is too negative, the proper question should be, what would God’s preferred world be like?

Most answer this question, the world would be a place where there was justice for all, no distinction between rich and poor, there would be peace throughout the world.

So the active Christian holds the world view that achieving justice and peace is a priority.

Thus, in verse 8, the writer of the letter says, “ those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works”

However, verse 9 says, “avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless.”.

The reason why lawyers are often so unpopular in the church is that the thinking lawyer’s worldview does not necessarily coincide with those of the majority of the congregation. The majority of our congregations unfortunately prefer to leave things the way they are. This often leads to a discussion in which the lawyer who disputes the view that the church should just continue to do what it has always done is put on the outer.

The accusation often made is that the lawyer is stirring up dissention, and is undermining the peace of the congregation or the pastor’s ministry.

Of course, verse 9 has nothing to say about discussions in the church of this nature. It addresses the old problem in the early church as to how freedom in Christ is compatible with the law of Moses or with the then popular Gnostic views.

However, sometimes it is used against the minority view. Sometimes it gets worse. I have been told that my views have been inspired by the devil and this in a debate as to whether the church next door should take our church over and close it down!

However, whilst there are occasions when discretion is the better part of valour, there are also occasions when it is a Christian's duty to put forward strongly unpopular views.

Again this depends on the type of church one is in. In some Catholic Churches and in some independent evangelical churches, the view of the priest or senior pastor is going to prevail, so that indirect action rather than direct action may be required to produce justice and truth.

I have been working backwards through the passage which we had as our second reading. The most important part is actually at the beginning.

The writer of the letter puts the essential gospel as well as it is put anywhere else. We can see that in verses 4-6. It was not by works of righteousness that we are saved but by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Now having got to the beginning, let's briefly go back to verse 13 via verse 8. Why? To use Charles 1's last word so that you might "Remember".

The early verses assure us that our salvation is the gift of God and does not depend on good works. However verse 8 reminds us of what God expects of people who have the skills to bring about God's rule on that is what God would have done.

Give Zenas everything he needs. Why? We don't know what mission Zenas and Apollos were undertaking. We should, however, realize our own mission.

We lawyers are in a good position to do good. Of course, we all have our duty to the court and to clients. However, within that we can as lawyers bring about God's rule by the way we tackle each opportunity to help that comes across our paths.

There is a trap here which lawyers need to watch and that is that it is very easy to feel so sympathetic to those we are helping that, instead of assisting the criminal to lead a better life and the adulterer to reform, the lawyers own standards fall. "Well", they think, "Most of all my family law clients are constantly committing adultery, in

this 21st century, they set the standard.” Similar thoughts arise with minor crime. This is a trap for lawyers and must be resisted by continuing to associate with committed Christians who maintain the high standards set in the Bible,

The church was told to give all assistance to Zenas the lawyer. We are members of a society where many lawyers have been endowed with ample funds. We must use what God has given to us both of skills and funds to bring about the coming of the kingdom. May the Lord give us the strength to do so.