



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

FEBRUARY 2008

Opening of Law Term Address 2008 Parramatta

Niall Reid, Moderator Uniting Church, NSW Synod
Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 5:1-12

As this service takes place between Sundays I have chosen the gospel reading from tomorrow in the Uniting Church's readings for the week and the OT reading for next Sunday – both readings having something to say about the giving of the law – Moses goes up the mountain to receive the law, and Jesus in the sermon on the mount proclaims the law.

Moses goes up the mountain to receive the law. At the heart of this law are the Ten Commandments, but the law of Moses, the body of law that is perceived to have come from God is much larger than those 10 laws. However, it is unlikely that all the law of Moses came into being at the same time, but rather was a body of law that grew over time, a long period of time, but nevertheless was regarded in its entirety as the law of Moses.

There was good reason for this – it gave the law absolute authority. This law in its totality, it has to be obeyed



God Actually!

Come along and hear
Roy Williams
(writer & lawyer)

February 18th at 5:30pm

at the offices of
Allens Arthur Robinson
Deutsche Bank Place,
Cnr Hunter & Philips Sts, Sydney

**Please RSVP to the editor to let us
know you are attending**

In 2005 Roy Williams was a successful lawyer, a litigation partner in one of Australia's largest law firms acting for some of the country's largest companies in some of its leading litigation.

Then in 2006 he had a life changing illness that made him re-evaluate his direction. He gave up what he had worked so hard to achieve and decided to become a writer (following in his father and brother's footsteps). Since then he has gone on to make contributions to the Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald, Dissent, Australian Literary Review and Inside Sport.

June will see the publication by ABC Books of his first book "God Actually". This book subtitled "why God probably exists, why Jesus was probably divine and why "rational" objections to religion are unconvincing" is in part a response to the polemics for atheism such as Dawkin's God Delusion and Hitchen's God is not Great. Williams presents a rational case for a faith that is not dogmatic, but is reasoned and questioning—something Dawkins and Hitchens would consider a contradiction in terms. Williams comes to the issues as someone who was comfortable, secular and agnostic well into his thirties.

Here is your opportunity to hear something of Roy's journey and to get a sneak preview of his book.

(Continued from page 1)

because it has come from God through Moses – in fact the law almost becomes synonymous with God. By the time of Jesus, for the Pharisees, the law was everything. The law represented a tangible experience of God, it was as if by obeying every aspect of the law one was held in God's presence, the law was God's embrace.

Is this so different to our own experience? Indeed, we speak of the rule of Law. The law is approached, maybe more so by lawyers, with a certain awe. At times one might think that it is worshipped. And lawyers? Garbed like priests, mediators of the holy!

Where does our law come from? Originally from kings who regarded or held themselves out to be the mouthpiece of God... an understanding that gave the laws they created something of a divine status. However, the law we know is not the same law as was enacted by William the Conqueror or one of his descendants, it has changed and grown and developed, been interpreted and added to by kings and legislatures and... yes courts of law, even if, like the Pharisees, those courts of law don't acknowledge they are changing the law when they interpret it. To interpret is like being a sculptor of a piece of fine hewn stone.

The law that rules 21st century NSW is not the same law as ruled mediaeval England, or indeed NSW under Governor Lachlan Macquarie. Yet we talk of the law as if it is omnipotent and eternally just. If that is so why does it change? How is it that homosexuality today is no crime, but some time ago it was, how is it that the whole system of land tenure and the laws of inheritance have changed? How can the law declare that this land is a vacant and unowned land and then a few hundred years later the courts declare that to be a flawed interpretation? The sculptor at work revealing the angel captured in the stone, as Michaelangelo declared of his statue of David. We may acknowledge a certain omnipotence about the law, all powerful in its influence or control over people, undoubtedly very significant in achieving the common good but not necessarily always right or just.

Where it is unjust the law changes (ultimately) – thus we see William Wilberforce, recently brought to prominent attention through the film "Amazing Grace" working in Parliament for 19 years seeking legislation which would abolish the slave trade. This was achieved in 1807, but not until 1833, legislation for the total abolition of slavery. The work of a lifetime for William Wilberforce – yet the law changes even if ever so slowly to reflect our understanding or notions of a just society. The great strength of the law is that it is changing and responding to the circumstances, issues and human dilemmas over which it rules.

And of course the law of the Pharisees was not the same law as Moses was to bring down from the mountain, it was law that had been interpreted and added to and explained in all sorts of detail and we

see Jesus, in the sermon on the mount interpret and change the law, despite the fact that he declares, right after the reading we have heard this morning, that not a jot, not a tittle of the law will be done away with. Yet, if we were to read on in Matthew's Gospel we find Jesus saying: "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you." Possibly the best known example being:

"you have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (the law of Moses). But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also..."

The great tension of faith is that we so desperately want to have an unchanging, eternal and perfect law to hold onto, reflecting an unchanging, eternal and perfect God and so what happens is that as the Pharisees took the law of Moses almost as their God, so also we see some take the whole bible almost as their God, it is understood in the same way as the law which Moses brought down from the mountain, received from the very hands of God.

Truth is, even if we believe every word of the bible is God's immutable word for all time, with the Pharisees and lawyers in modern time we interpret and add to and change the words, the immutable word and its meaning to align with our theological position, our understanding of God, our way of life, our cultural circumstances – and we do this whether we be bible believing Christians or wishy-washy liberals or whatever else we might be, and we do the bible no service in such pretence – its strength is in rereading, reunderstanding it and the God it bears witness to in light of the circumstances, issues and human dilemmas we face. The law Jesus refers to is something more than that which has been handed down, something deeper, more essential, more profound than any written code. The law at its best is an expression of a dynamic, living search, chipping away at the mistakes and failures to find the essential word of God which is the law Jesus speaks of, that Jesus begins to reveal.

William Wilberforce sought to respond to the God he knew, the God of the bible, the God of Jesus, the God who, in other times and in the bible itself, seemed to favour slavery. The revelation for William Wilberforce was that God did not favour slavery. This revelation came from a reading of the same bible from which slavery was justified.

In recent times we have heard it said that the Tsunami which caused so much devastation on the fringes of the Indian Ocean was God's punishment, God's warning... once upon a time we might have said that; those who wrote about Noah and the flood might have said that; some of the prophets might have said that... Job didn't say that; Jesus moves us on and talks about the rain falling on the good and the evil alike, he says the 18 people upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were no more sinners than anyone else, and those Galileans Pilate massacred were no more sinners than anyone else

We see tension in the bible, the bible which proclaims the Jews as the chosen people to be set apart and kept apart, whose God is prepared for the people of Israel to massacre those who are not of his fold, who were not the chosen people, indeed it is the righteous thing to do, and surely we see this word, the law of this God echoing down into the present day in Israel/Palestine and in the acts of terrorism of our world be they sponsored by states, organizations or individuals. There is this tension between the Jews as the chosen people and the Jews as a light unto gentiles, and gentiles as unclean and yet instruments of God... we see this tension between a message of exclusion and ultimately the gospel message that was for all people. What does that say to us in our multifaith world? What is the understanding of God that we are to have now? How are we to reinterpret the faith for the common good of all.

The challenge for us today is not to grimly hold onto the faith of old pretending we are applying it in our lives just in the same way as we did 2000 years ago, a bit like judges in court pretending they do not change the law when the body of law we have tells us this is not true, the challenge is to follow in the way of Jesus and reinterpret and reunderstand who God is for us in the world of today, and indeed continue to allow the true nature of God to unfold.

Easier to pretend that the law and God do not change but the truth is, even if God does not change, our un-

derstanding of God does change – Jesus revealed that to us – and with that change in understanding comes a change in the law of life by which we abide, and that is true whether we want to admit it or not.

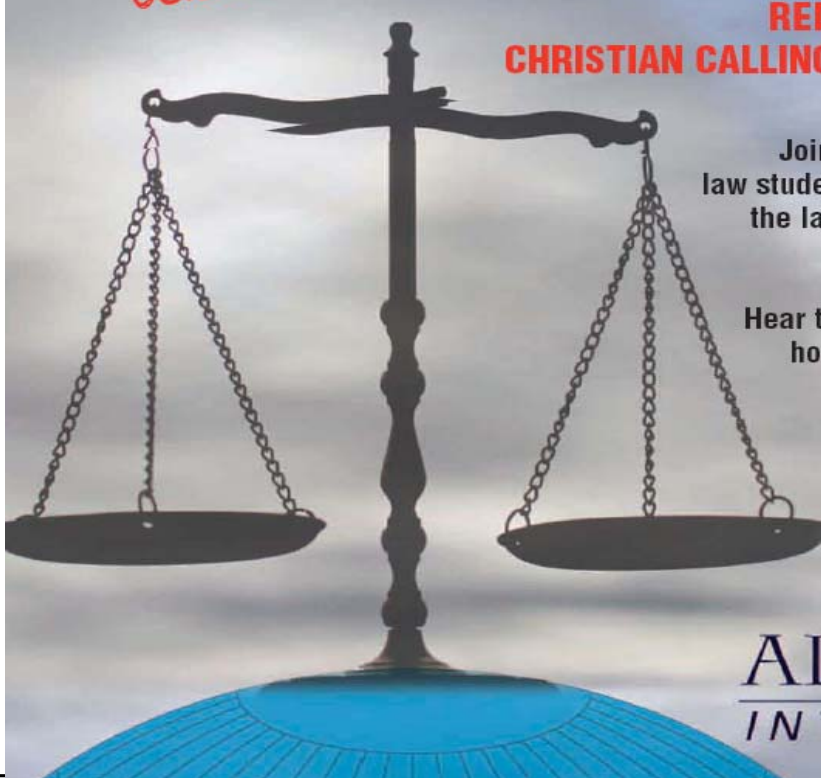
In accordance with the words of the Prophet Micah, in one of the daily readings for this week, may we respond to what God requires of us, not simply by obedience to the rule of law but by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God, which is at the heart, which is the essence of the law that we would seek to uphold.

I finish with a comment on Micah 6:8 by Richard John Neuhaus

"Strive to do justice - strive real hard. And when you discover that it is often impossible, then at least love mercy. And when you have lived long enough and failed often enough to realise, how hard it is to do justice and even to love mercy all the time, then, brothers and sisters, you will know why it is that you must walk humbly with your God"

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..."

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth."



*Mark Your Calendars
For the First Week of
October 2008*

The 5th Global Convocation

Co-hosted by Advocates International and the Christian Legal Society

REDEEMING LAW: CHRISTIAN CALLING AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Join over 1500 Christian lawyers and law students from 150 nations and 6 continents - the largest gathering of Christian lawyers in the history of Planet Earth!

Hear the speakers from 6 continents share how to bear witness of Jesus Christ through the legal profession!

October 9 - 12, 2008
Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill
Washington, DC

ADVOCATES
INTERNATIONAL
Doing Justice with Compassion



Faith comes by Hearing - The God of the Podcast

Over the years (long before iPods and iTunes) long term readers of this newsletter have read it extolling the virtues of listening to talks, sermons and lectures distributed over the internet. I first discovered audio books (tapes back then) when I had young children and found the time that I used to allocate for reading had disappeared and when I had time I was normally too sleep deprived to actually stay awake for more than a chapter. I then took to listening as I walked home, listening as I mowed the lawn and listening as I washed up.

While often the best still has to be paid for, there are various courses generously made available free. Many of our churches now make available the weekly sermons for download from their website. Google the name of your favourite preacher/teacher with the word audio and you will often find online resources to download and listen.

With the benefit of programs like iTunes you can have your computer automatically download particular radio programs and sermons from your favourite preacher.

For those who would like the stimulation of university level teaching two seminaries deserve special mention- Reformed Theological Seminary and Covenant Theological Seminary. Both make available courses that can be downloaded (see the LCF website for an electronic (PDF) version of this newsletter to take you there). There are series on exegesis, biblical theology and ethics. For those who like biographical series Covenant have two series on the life of 1970s apologist and cultural critique on Francis Schaeffer by Jeram Barrs, while RTS have a fine series on C.S.Lewis.

Another organisation which has as its goal making available good quality teaching (particularly for those in the two third world) is Biblicaltraining.org. Gerald Bray's series on church history is an entertaining listen (some of the things he says are outrageous but humorous). There are also ethics series by Ronald Nash and an introduction to other religions from a Christian perspective for those who want to understand their muslim colleague better.

There are other institutions such as Regent College Vancouver that have in the last two years made available their courses (and outlines) for purchase and download (which saves the 20% shipping cost). Anything by Bruce Waltke (OT) normally comes with notes that run to hundreds of pages. For those interested in detailed exegesis Gordon Fee's series on Galatians, Revelation or 2 Corinthians are worth a listen. One of the benefits of Regent is that it caters to students from around the world and its faculty and guest lecturers reflect a range of denominations and

nationalities. Recent lecture series include the annual Laing Lectures by Miroslav Volf on *Public Faith in a Pluralistic Society*, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff on *Love and Justice* and sociologist Peter Berger on *Globalisation, Religion and Culture*. All of these are world renowned academics in their own fields. You can also learn Systematic Theology from J.I. Packer who is still going strong and regularly teaching into his 80s.

Another company which produces a broad range of teaching materials is the Teaching Company. It was set up to bring to people some of the United States most gifted tertiary teachers. This is a useful resource for home schoolers but also for those with an interest in learning. The range of subjects are broad (sciences, music, history, economics, philosophy), as are the perspectives from which subjects are taught. There are series on early Church history, the Reformation and the other major faiths, Augustine, and C.S.Lewis. In the last twelve months a number of the courses (together with detailed course outlines) have become available for download in audio. The majority of courses work well in audio though some really benefit from the DVD presentation.

For those who find lectures unfulfilling and prefer the coherence of books, for the last three years Christianaudio.com has been recording Christian books in audio format. Audio books are an increasing proportion of the book market. These books can be purchased individually or you can subscribe monthly which entitles you to 8 points which can be applied to purchases (most books are 4points). For those who sign up, but do not subscribe, you are still entitled to download each month's free audio book. These are classics whose literary copyright (though not in the audio production) has expired. These have in the past twelve months included works by Milton, Augustine, G.K. Chesterton, A.W. Pink, and Jonathan Edwards. Recent books, which you have to pay for, include those by Brian McClaren (who is synonymous with the emerging church), John Stott and John Piper.

Last but not least are talks on a range of topics from the UK LCF. These include recent seminars, talks to their young lawyers group and talks from their weekend conference. Recent talks have included:

Justice Crooke A Christian Perspective on Commercial Legal Practice;

David McIlroy, barrister, A Biblical View of Law and Justice.

Good listening.

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