



# Lawyers' Christian Fellowship NEWSLETTER

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April 2002

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**Pre Convention Event**



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A key speaker at the Australasian Christian Legal Convention will present

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## Who do you say that I am?

*A report and abridgment of an address delivered by Archbishop Peter Jensen on 29 January 2002 at the Opening of Law Term Service at St James King Street.*

In what this attendee considered an unusual choice of topic for a commencement of law term address to an audience of mainly lawyers Archbishop Peter Jensen reflected on the significance of the Lord's Supper.

Archbishop Jensen asked us to consider how we would remember a public person - initially a wake, then a monument perhaps even an annual dinner. But how long before the memory would fade -like the street signs of Sydney - George, Pitt, Castlereagh and Elizabeth and the symbol of remembrance become divorced from the remembered. How remarkable then is the Lord's Supper which is still celebrated by millions around the world weekly. The Archbishop noted that *"the extraordinary tenacity of the memory of Jesus may suggest to you that a serious adult examination of a thoughtful person should at least have an answer to the question he put to his disciples: 'who do you say that I am?'"* Secondly he noted that the Lord's Supper is based in history, not mythology, its origins are with Christ and *continuing the original sources for the life and teachings of Jesus Christ is worth undertaking. Any impetus comes from him; the meal puts us in touch with him; it is like handling some precious item which he once owned, to feel that we are in touch with the man whose name is not so much written as ploughed into history. To ignore him, to act as though he never*

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God - The Xep

God - The Xep

*lived and never spoke is to distort our own history, our own self understanding. It is like saving the television from the bushfire but neglecting the family photos. In the end, it is cultural suicide.*

The Archbishop then identified three elements in that original meal that Christ celebrated with his disciples which "explain why Jesus Christ has such a tenacious grip on our historical memory and continues to shape and challenge the way we live today". These elements are:

1. The meaning of the meal itself.
2. The meaning given to the bread and the wine.
3. The vow of Jesus Christ to be steadfast to death.

### **The Meaning of the Meal itself**

Meals had a great significance in Jesus day as they do today. They speak of a commonality, a companionship with those we eat with. This meal was the last that is the last in a series. A series that had included meals with tax collectors and sinners - behaviour considered scandalous by the religious authorities and yet was an act which "embodied reconciliation and forgiveness". To eat at the table of Jesus is "to be welcomed and accepted by him, and thus reconciled to God".

At the table of the Lord was also one who would betray him and whose name would become synonymous with treachery and baseness. Judas rejected the basic condition of acceptance - he rejected the leadership of Jesus.

The meal also had meaning in that it was the Passover meal - a meal at which the Jews remembered the saving acts of God in releasing them from slavery into covenant with Him at Mt Sinai. In giving the wine and the bread symbolic significance he was speaking of another great saving act of God.

### **The Meaning given to the Bread and the Wine**

In the act of eating the bread - "Take, eat; this is my body" we are involved in a metaphor of being united with Jesus Christ. "To trust in Jesus Christ, to have faith in him is to be united with him, to "eat" him, if you will, so that he will nourish your soul".

But it is not just his body that we are to remember but it is also his blood - "Drink from it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins". "It is the action of others in putting him to death; the end result of the betrayal by Judas; the separation of his body and his blood; it is not his body as such, it was what is accomplished in his body. In asking them to eat and to drink, he is inviting them to enter a contract in which the cost to him

*would be his death, and the benefit for them would be forgiveness."*

The Archbishop then reflected on the nature of covenant as a promise rather than a contract and therefore should be preferred over that term. "According to the gospels, there was an old covenant, the promises of God to Israel, and now there is a new covenant, the promise of forgiveness through the death of Jesus."

He commented:

*You must hear a lot of promises in your professional capacity. Think about the characteristics of promises. Promises always look forward; they are always verbal; and the right thing to do with a promise, the way to receive its benefit, is to believe it, to trust it and to act on it. Eating and drinking at the table of Jesus is to say that we accept his promise, that we trust it, that we believe it and will act upon it. That is what you do with promises. The religion of the Bible is a religion of faith not because it is irrational, but because it has to do with entering a relationship with God by trusting his promises. It is only rational to trust the promises of God; it is irrational to doubt them.*

*The content of this promise is clear: forgiveness of sins. Not a forgiveness achieved by simple declaration as though God is a forgiveness-dispenser. Life is not that simple; reality is more complex than that. Forgiveness without justice and truth is cheap goods. True forgiveness involves justice at some level. It therefore comes through pain and suffering; forgiveness through the sacrifice of the offended party; in fact, according to the Bible, forgiveness for the many comes through the judicial death of the one.*

At this stage the Archbishop answered the question which I am sure a number were asking - why talk to a group of lawyers about the Lord's supper? The Archbishop's rationale was as follows:

*In part it is because I know better than to speak to you about the law; that is your business. But to consider Jesus Christ must be very relevant. When we think of the reality of history and our need to take history seriously, when we talk about covenants and promises made to be trusted, when we talk about penalty and guilt, when we consider the link between justice and forgiveness, we are not so very far from your world after all. In fact I am bold enough to say that we are observing of the roots of your world, the roots you may not actually think about often in the necessary rush of business, but the roots which inform and sustain your whole endeavour. And I am saying that Jesus Christ and the*



*Bible are places in which we encounter these basic elements.*

### **The Vow of Jesus Christ to be Steadfast to Death**

'I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom'. Jesus was no crazed martyr - he shrank from death but he saw beyond his own death to the effects of his death, the establishment of the covenant which brings forgiveness.

The suffering of one man can bring peace in even in our day. Consider the testimony of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who campaigned against apartheid and who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He identifies Nelson Mandela's suffering as key to helping Africa survive the anger and alienation of the post apartheid era:

*'Nelson Mandela did not emerge from prison spewing words of hatred and revenge. He amazed us all by his heroic embodiment of reconciliation and forgiveness...No one could say that he knew nothing about suffering...It would be easy to say that those twenty-seven years were utter shameful waste...I don't think so. Those twenty-seven years and all the suffering they entailed were the fires of the furnace that tempered his steel, that removed the dross. Perhaps without that suffering he would have been less able to be as compassionate and as magnanimous as he turned out to be.'* (pp 39-40). **No Future Without Forgiveness**, Desmond Tutu,

While Mandela's achievement was great - Jesus Christ was greater for through his suffering "he brings in the Kingdom of God, the restoration of God's rule over human lives."

Archbishop Jensen then concluded:

*What are we doing here today? Are we merely going through some obsolete ritual reminiscent of chapel at a boarding school? Has it any meaning for the members of this profession to start the official term with an act of thanksgiving and dedication? I am saying that it surely makes sense, that in drawing us back to foundational matters, matters of history and of promises and of forgiveness we see again how the concerns of the Bible intersect our personal and our professional lives; and I am saying to you that the Jesus Christ who so long ago impressed his disciples with talk of the covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins, still confronts us out of history with promises and hopes which illumine, shape and bless our human lives. In short, I am saying that it is still worth answering the question posed for us by Jesus himself: 'Who do you say that I am?'*



## **LCF UK—150 years of Faithful Service**

Congratulations to the LCF UK which last month celebrated its 150th anniversary at a service addressed by the retiring Archbishop of Canterbury Dr George Carey.

In that service Dr Carey observed that:

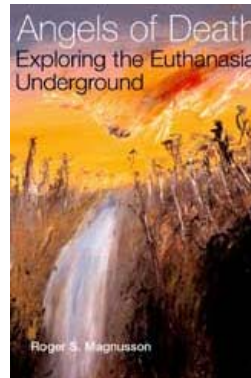
*"In our society there is a disturbing tendency towards the compartmentalising of faith and one's professional activity.*

*"For fear of offending those around them - and possibly also out of respect for the beliefs of others - Christians have been inclined to leave their faith at home, thus leading to an increasingly privatised religion."*

He added: *"One of the great challenges for any Christian living today is that of integrating one's faith with one's daily activity and work."*

Amen!

A link to Dr Carey's address is included on the LCF home page - [www.lcf.pnc.com.au](http://www.lcf.pnc.com.au)



### **Angels of Death Exploring the Euthanasia Underground**

**Roger S. Magnusson  
Melbourne University Press,  
2002, \$29.25**

With the re-introduction and defeat of Ian Cohen's (Greens MLA) "Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill" in the State Parliament last month and the proposed suicide of a Queensland grandmother euthanasia is likely to be on the agenda again.

Even a casual observer of the debate over euthanasia will have been confronted by the argument that legalisation is necessary to regulate the already extensive practise of euthanasia by health care professionals. While there is plenty of room to debate the extent of this illegal practise little is known of how euthanasia functions other than perhaps in urban myth. Magnus-

son attempts to document this "euthanasia underground" as he terms it. His methodology is to interview individuals who are involved in this practise. Most of the subjects of the interviews are health professionals involved in the treatment of patients with HIV drawn from Sydney, Melbourne and San Francisco. This reviewer wonders whether the inclusion of San Francisco was to make it difficult for people to be able to identify the participants in the study who are resident in Australia.

While ultimately the author favours the regulation rather than prohibition of euthanasia this book is a useful resource for participants on both sides of the debate regarding legalisation. For those opposed to legalisation the book provides a disturbing window into a disjunctive underground of individuals who are involved in the euthanasing of patients. This underground includes not only doctors and nurses but also a funeral director and a couple of therapists. This book provides plenty of evidence of what is not only unprofessional conduct but also clearly criminal conduct.

In this respect there is one disturbing instance of a judge who was present at the time of the euthanasing of a patient. No doubt some legal readers will speculate as to who that judge might be but of course given the San Francisco sample that speculation might be based in the wrong continent.

There is a fascinating discussion of what motivates people who request suicide who have AIDS. While this is based on the perception of the interviewees who assisted, it shows that unresolved/chronic pain is not the only factor—deterioration of quality of life, not wishing to be a burden, fear of the process of dying and exhaustion from fighting the disease are all prominent factors.

The chapter dealing with suicide talk rightly points out the complexity of requests to die and how they might really be a way of the patient asking— "will you be with me to the end". One community nurse noted (p.82) that the goal posts get shifted because when the patient reaches the point where they had previously decided life would be intolerable, it has been a gradual process, "It's sort of snuck up on them, and it's not as bad as they thought it was going to be"

There are also accounts where the person changes their mind and is pressured by friends to continue with their suicide pledge. One of the interviewees notes that "Sometimes there is a notion in the HIV area.. That suicide is the noble way out, that suicide is what really strong people do".

The author realises the distinctiveness of the HIV community and the role of AIDS at p.82 when he states:

"One reason why AIDS is fuelling the euthanasia debate is because of the values and beliefs of those who have most felt the impact, particularly gay men. AIDS has impacted upon an urbanised, hedonistic, largely post-Christian population focused upon body image, personal identity, and achievement."

The study also indicates the role that depression plays and the difficulty this poses for people who participate in the euthanasia underground.

It is also evident that many of the people who form this underground are isolated from other practitioners for fear of discovery and that the underground nature of the practice and the consequent lack of knowledge of participants has led to botched attempts at euthanasia.

The author's conclusion that regulation is appropriate is a harm minimisation approach that concludes that it is better to regulate something that is occurring to minimise the harm to those euthanased and to the practitioners. However the author admits that many who form part of this underground do not want regulation as they do not want the burden of red tape and would continue to operate in defiance of regulation as they now do in the defiance of the law.

While the author attempts to be fair and balanced in reproducing the opinions of those who oppose euthanasia practice passing phrases such as "autocratic religions" seem to indicate that he is not a fan of the approach of institutional churches in opposing euthanasia.

In conclusion, a useful resource for anyone who wants to participate in the debate in an informed manner and a must for Christian medical practitioners from whom members of the underground are most likely to hide their activities.

## Membership Renewal

Enclosed is my cheque for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ being my membership fee for the 2002 year.

Membership fees: Students	\$ NIL
Practitioners (under three years in practise)	\$ 20.00
Practitioners (over three years practise)	\$ 35.00

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