



Lawyers' Christian Fellowship Newsletter

www.lawyerschristianfellowship.org

April 2005

Law Week Dinner 2005

Religious Freedom in Australia

The Hon Bruce Baird
M.P.
Federal member for Cook



16 May 2005

7pm for 7:30pm

Venue to be announced.



11 April 2005

Informal Dinner
at
CITY EXTRA
Circular Quay

6.30pm

Just turn up



HAVE YOU RENEWED
YOUR MEMBERSHIP
FOR
2005?

Lawyers Living Advent-urously

Delivered at the Lawyers Christian Fellowship Christmas Function 2004

Everyone from the ABC to the Telegraph has been lamenting the absence of Christmas in Sydney this year due to Clover Moore's misguided overdose of secular multicultural sensitivity. Ironically, it never seems to come from Jews or Muslims, the latter believing in Jesus' Virgin Birth. But most of the discussion didn't get much further than lack of tinsel, colour, song and celebration and the rights of Anglo-Saxon tradition in a multicultural society. There wasn't much about Christ except a few relatively predictable Christian outbursts. It's getting even harder to remember Christ at Christmas, but I suspect more is due to our view of time and money than a secular conspiracy. I got an email this week about a woman who'd run out of patience after taking two young children Christmas shopping and just squeezing into the elevator after nearly losing one child in the doors. She let out a huge sigh and said 'whoever invented Christmas should be found, strung up and shot.' From the back of the car came a quiet calm voice saying 'Don't worry, we already crucified him.' You could have cut the air with a knife.

The pressure to perform though isn't confined to Christmas - overwhelming pressure to go to every party, try everything epicurean while also dieting and gymning to keep the weight off, getting the perfect gift for everyone - forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us. The pressure is seen in the Christmas letters that outdo the Jones', even the Christian Jones'. They tell you about their kids 99.9 UAR in the HSC at their Christian school while leading their youth group, starring in the school play, organising a short-term mission trip to the 3rd world, raising \$5000 for World Vision's 40 Hour Famine, scoring the winning try or goal in the grandfinal which they just managed to squeeze in before their family's holiday to Paris. They don't tell you of course that they, the parent, didn't get to see the grandfinal as they were working on a big case, they weren't around to help when their child was having a nervous breakdown during the HSC and they spent half their time in Paris on line to the office. And that their child used the 40 hr famine as an excuse for their anorexia, is ready to rebel, or take a year back-packing, at having to live out a Christian version of 1950s Pleasantville.

My suggested solution, however, at least for Christians, isn't just to put the Christ back into Christmas or make everyday like Christmas Day. It's to put Christmas back into Christmas. I think we need to restore Advent. Stop rushing through to Christmas (see cartoon). The early Church sanctified the ancient Roman calendar and its pagan sense of time with a calendar and rhythmic time-line structured according to the story of salvation. It started with Advent, the twenty or so days beginning on the 4th Sunday before Christmas Day. Christians fasted and prayed and waited patiently, longing for the coming of the Messiah, not just the first coming but also the second - you know the one that only American fundamentalist wackos seem to believe in these days - joining with the great hope of generations of God's people to appreciate the sheer magnitude of the messianic hope, of one who'll bring a new heavens and new earth where justice and peace resides (Isa 11, 61, 2 Peter

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3:13). This heightened sense of anticipation would give way to overwhelming joy and celebration at the incarnation of this hope, taking the place of the Roman sun god at the centre of creation, the calendar and our sense of time.

But fast-food, consumer Christianity with its secularised sense of time is so eager to get to Christmas that we bypass Advent. We're like kids when we take off for holidays asking 'are we there yet?', after an hour of their 10 hour trip, unable to enjoy the journey because of premature arrival. Rather than enjoying the view from the panoramic perspective of Advent we're rushing to get our work finished so we can take a break. Because we know how the story ends we rush through the long, lavish and miraculous, material detail about how God patiently prepared a people – how God sent his Son when the time had fully come (Gal 4:4). Pardon the sexual language but we want the climax without the foreplay that heightens expectation and hope. Rather than savouring the plaintive mood of 'O come o come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear...' we want to jump into Joy to the World or Silent Night at the beginning of December. We give in to our desire for instant gratification driven to distraction by kids who are targeted to pester their parents by corporate paedophiles. We fail to make space for the magnitude of the messianic hope. And we fail to feel the fullness of the joy of the Incarnation because we can't really sing Joy to the World unless we've really rehearsed 'O come, O come Immanuel' (See S. Grenz, 'Drive-Through Christmas', *Christianity Today*, 6/12/1999).

What's this got to do with lawyers in particular? Well I think the challenge for lawyers is that they perhaps more than anyone, with their 6 minute billing periods, have had their sense of time secularised and shortened to eliminate an Advent – urous perspective. And I don't mean the adventure of James Spader and Sharon Stone on *The Practice*.

Let me share with you the following accounts (from the course MCSI plans to run for Christian lawyers in the middle of 2005) of people who've lost the sense of adventure in law. Locum lawyer and freelance writer Julie Szego's article 'A Journey without Corporate Baggage: How Generation X is rebelling against the modern work ethic' depicts the Quarter-life Crisis precisely. She describes having left her job in a prestigious Melbourne law firm to backpack Europe.

I found youth hostels packed with 25 to 35-year-olds – all, like me, defectors from respectable jobs: lawyers, public servants, environmental scientists. My international comrades in arms. We didn't know where we were going, but we knew what we were escaping from ... Since my return I've found that all my peers are running off to careers as counsellors or New Age

quacks with crystal balls. There's soul searching and aptitude testing. We're convinced that somewhere between the school yard and the office building with the talking lift, we've missed the correct turn-off ... Everyone I know seems to be going part-time, casual and short-term, so they can write the TV script, do the photography course, finish their masters.

Why are we gambling with the weekly pay cheque? Why are we opting for the insecurity that puts mortgages and shopping malls beyond our reach? ... It's a personal rebellion against the corporate ethic of 44-hour days and box-ticking performance appraisals; against the subtle, soul-destroying conditioning of the paranoid, air-conditioned workplace. We've read the writing on the wall ... There's no such thing as a job for life. So why not put life first and let jobs and careers come and go?

But what's the answer? I think Michael Kirby is right in his article 'Billable Hours in a Noble Calling', though only vaguely spiritual in the way he describes it. We need some sense of transcendence and eternity impinging on the everyday, not seeing life as transient six minute billing periods. In my terms we need to put 'the awe back into the ordinary'. Biblically I don't believe that we do this by ditching law and going into 'ministry', (unless that's what God's gifted and called you to). As if law isn't a ministry or service - the word is the same in the New Testament – and if the Roman State is described as God's minister or servant in Romans 13: then the law obviously is.

I don't believe it's only by stopping commercial law or going into legal aid or public service law, although they're legitimate options. One anonymous lawyer describes himself churning form his keen sense of identification with the pressures of commercial law on the young lawyer in John Grisham's *The Firm*.

It was the early mornings, the billable hours, the constant pressure to perform, the sense of always being watched, the timesheets, and the minutiae of legal practice that created the churning. It wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't just begun four weeks annual leave specifically aimed at de-stressing.

On return to work he suffered severe distress and debilitating migraines. He became aware that 'Legal practice was dehumanising in that the person of the lawyer was largely to be left at home. ... Success, the appearance of success and the reflection of success in the monthly billings were key. For some employers, their employees were assets before they were people, and that impacted how they were treated'.

So I left private practice and went into the pub-

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lic service. Ah, how satisfying it was to be helping people who were really in need and to be bringing bad guys to account. [But] in no time at all, my inner weakness for alcoholism became evident. No one except me was expecting the hours that I kept. Indeed, a thoughtful superior encouraged me to slow down. This period showed me that, although the pressures of private practice were explicit in demanding to own me, I was driven by a powerful internal need to perform.

By contrast, I heard from a commercial lawyer this week how he sees helping two companies reach an out of court settlement as part of God's redemptive or Kingdom purpose to 'heal creation.' Or of how pastoral situations often get referred to him, or how he prayed publicly when he found out a colleague's wife had a life-threatening illness. And his prayer was answered. Escape from commercial law is not necessarily the solution. Nor is it necessarily the kind of alternative and New Age option Julie Szego describes. A 'devout believer' like Obadiah who was in charge of King Ahab's palace saved 100 prophets from death at the hands of Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3, 4). Sometimes it is right, for some people, to set up alternative structures, but not for all.

The problem is most acute when our sense of identity has been co-opted by the corporation and its concept of time. It can be agonisingly acute when our families suffer from our shrunken sense of time. As Teresa Stanton Collett puts it:

I realized I had lost the true sense of myself when I sat in a paediatrician's office with our sick son and measured time in terms of 'billable hours wasted', not because pressing needs of my clients were being neglected, or some ogre-like partner would criticize my time – records – but rather because I, myself, had come to believe that practicing law should be the exclusive activity of my 'workday' and anything else was at best a distraction and at worst 'a waste'. I no longer understood myself to be a woman of God

blessed with a family and a calling to serve God through helping my clients seek and do justice. Instead, I had come to understand myself as a lawyer, who 'happened' to be religious and 'happened' to have a family.

It is not only a woman's problem. Ray Willis ('If only it could be that simple', *Zadok Perspectives* 52, Autumn 1996, 9) describes a not uncommon scenario:

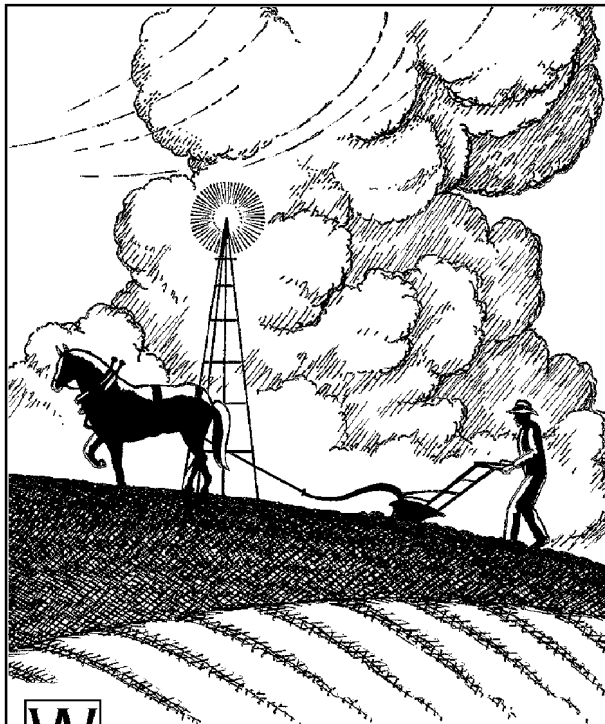
At 4:45 pm I have just left the court and am in my office. This evening I have to attend a school concert for my kids. I am about to leave when the office manager ducks her head in to let me know I have to do Court tomorrow for a colleague and the files are on her desk. I know what this means – preparation all night, family disappointment and heaps of stress. These are not things I am paid for but they are very much part of my job... What is a Christian to do?

The attitude or belief that a working Christian should always put 'the family first' [now enshrined in the name of our newest, and avowedly Christian, political party] over work is difficult to question. So too is the concept that our spiritual or church responsibilities should have priority over work commitments. Both sentiments, for the Christian, are akin to 'motherhood statements'. ... Yet, how do these fine words shape up against hard reality?

Some psychologists, Willis notes, counsel working to rule, a strict nine to five. It's simple, knock back the case. Some make out that work is simply about money and family about relationships so the choice is clear. People before money. But life is never that simple. Work too is about relationships. (See 'Work' in M. Schluter & D. Lee, *The R Option*).

As Willis says:

Firstly I have yet to meet a Judge or Magistrate who would find such an excuse acceptable. Why?



WHATEVER YOU DO, WORK AT IT WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AS WORKING FOR THE LORD.
COLOSSIANS 3 : 23

Because they too are concerned with the lives of other players in the courtroom drama – the accused, the ‘victim’, the witnesses and other lawyers who might have been burning the midnight oil as well. Furthermore, do I not have a responsibility as a Christian to consider the pains, fears and frustrations of others? ... For example, if through a lack of preparation on my part a case must be adjourned, it might not be heard for weeks or months. An accused person might be in custody waiting; a sick witness further traumatised. The psychologist’s response ... is to say ‘you still have a choice’. Strictly speaking, that is true, I can choose to be a lawyer, a prosecutor or even whether to be employed at all! For me, such answers do not help.

Willis rightly seeks help in the Scriptures, in Paul’s counsel to slaves: ‘Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-34). The key for Willis is serving the Lord sacrificially through producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) at work as well as home and church. He desires balance, although ability to juggle may be a better metaphor. ‘I will not abandon my family; I will do what I can to contribute to the life of the church. I will also do my job ‘as serving the Lord’ – somehow I will be Christian, husband, father and lawyer all at once’.

Willis shows that simplistic family values answers are not the way forward, for all the importance of the family. Nor is it forgetting to bill your hours. We need to be responsible, we need to be good stewards. I think that Willis’ image of simultaneously juggling different roles is helpful. Like Paul in 1 Cor 7:29-31 it’s being bi-focal, focusing on the billable hours but simultaneously in the light of the larger hope and sense of Advent time, ‘doing business, getting married, but as if not doing business and getting married’, for the structure of this world is passing away.

Our prayer under pressure may be like Cromwell’s ‘praise the Lord and pass the ammunition. Or in midst of conflict, and let’s face it law is an adversarial, competitive culture, ‘Lord if this day I forget you, I pray do not forget me’. (This is not to forget Ken Crispin’s challenge to Law as an Adversarial System in an old Zadok Paper). But our forgetting isn’t just an individual thing, to inflict guilt on ourselves over; it’s a cultural thing and the antidote is for small professional groups of Christian lawyers, and small groups of mixed Christians, families, friends etc, who can see our professional blindspots, to form an alternative culture, to hold us mutually accountable to our professional sense of time and an Advent sense of time, to live simultaneously, bi-focally, Kingdomly, to live Advent-urously.

Delivered at the LCF Christmas Function 2004 by Dr Gordon Preece who is Director of Macquarie Christian Studies Institute (www.mcsi.edu.au) which offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses for credit or audit including Bachelor of Christian Studies and courses for professional development, including law. Courses include Christianity and Pop Culture (Winter intensive) and also in Sem. 2 Theology of Work and Pastoral Care of Workers (St. Paul’s College Cranebrook), Business Ethics, and Christianity and Science. He is also editor of *Zadok Perspectives*, *Rethinking Peter Singer* and *The Bible and the Business of Life*. gpreece@mcsi.edu.au

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Membership Renewal for 2005

- I
- would prefer to receive this newsletter by email in Adobe PDF format and my email address is:
- am willing to receive reminders and notices from the Fellowship by email and my email address is:

Enclosed is my cheque for \$ _____ being my membership fee for the 2005 year.

Membership fees: Students	\$ NIL
Practitioners (under three years in practise)	\$ 20.00
Practitioners (over three years in practise)	\$ 45.00

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