

Faith in Law: Reasons for Hope



Director Christine John ponders questions of work and faith

We are a generation who worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship..." (Anonymous)

Even we Christians are steeped in that culture. We teach it to our children; often subliminally by the way we live.

In the 1960s when I was growing up and learning to think for myself - good years, weren't they! - I was taught anything was possible if I wanted and worked hard enough for it.

Today, we are told people no longer believe they have any sway over their own future. That some entity called, "global market forces," rules the world and everyone in it. We are no longer in charge of our own destiny; we are alienated from the decision making process and, as we saw recently, we are at the mercy of direct action lobbying groups.

Lawyers are not immune. We often see ourselves as the victims of change driven by the economic policies of government, and we perceive the battle for justice has already been lost to the Treasury accountants.

We all see, as practitioners, the "I" society of "my" rights, without responsibilities. This, combined with the relativism that now pervades both our Christian and secular worlds, it seems to me, has had a profound impact on the western psyche.

If we as a society, focus on "me," "my rights" and "my experience," we elevate what "I" want above all else. Our view of right and wrong becomes subjective and an individual emotional response to any given situation. Morality it may be argued, is relative to a particular individual or group of people and may well change dependent upon time and place. There are no absolutes and what is right and wrong varies around the world and across history.

We must be tolerant and "tolerance" is such a seductive word, isn't it?

This is not just from the politicians either. Many in the Christian movements in the west, likewise place tolerance at the top of any secular virtues they hold to be good. And what's the problem anyway! For Christians, the love of God and all those made in His image is the foundation stone of our faith. So how can we not be tolerant?

I think the answer is obvious: when to tolerate something offends the love of God. When it adds to the wounds of our Saviour, Jesus.

In the midst of this, our western society built on sand, the ethical tensions abound. Shareholder v. stakeholder, business v. human rights, business v. morality, growth v. costs of growth (environmental and human).

We are actually the first generation in a position to destroy both the eco system upon which we rely and the genetic balance which is the human race. Within this world we live and try to operate as lawyers.

But we are also a part of God's original creation and that gives us reason for hope!

We are told in Genesis 1:26, that "God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let him rule...over all the earth" and again at 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

Man was involved in God's creation at the earliest stage, made with Him, to tend the garden. We are to share the responsibility of the work of stewarding the earth. We are to be nothing less than God's representatives on earth as He works out His purposes through us. Graham Dow calls us, "God's Under Managers" and Walter Eichrodt says

that the resemblance humankind bears to God attaches "a manifest value to work" and that this means men and women are: "meant to find the development of their aptitudes and powers in purposeful labour, in which they are to possess a facsimile of the divine work of creation and its joy."

In other words it is our way of achieving fulfilment as human beings.

And we are not alone. God's there with us like a doting parent willing us to make the right choice every time we walk through the door of the office, or into a court room. Waiting to work with us, alongside and within us. Because it is through our work we are to glorify and worship him. It is us "he uses to conduct his creative sustaining and redemptive work and it is through and in that work that we reach our full potential and gifting, endowed by God". (From *Work Well, Live Well*, by David Wescott.)

If we open ourselves to those possibilities and serve others by providing for their needs, we are actively looking to live and work in God's image. What is more, when we do so, the rewards are promised by Jesus, who redeems all that has gone before and by His Spirit encourages us in our Christ-likeness: "Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Luke 11:28.

How does our knowledge of our earthly purpose and the promise of divine support, affect our Christian behaviour? What does confessing Christ actually mean or involve when we're at work?

As Christians, we are recipients of both the great commission to go out and preach the word (Mark 16:15, Matt 28:19,20) and the great commandment to love our neighbour (Matt 22:39) without expectation of reward (Luke 6:35). Indeed John Stott argues both are expressions of the same unfeigned love (1 John 3:17,18). This has practical implications for our vocation and for the LCF as an organisation.

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Beginning with our vocation, I believe we are called to 4 practical priorities:

- To work hard
- To be salt and light in the world
- To take our opportunities where we find them, and
- To let justice toll!

Let's look at those briefly.

• To work hard;

We are encouraged in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" and in Ephesians 6:7 "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."

It seems ridiculous to even contemplate working harder. The question we need to ask ourselves is rather, do our priorities match the Lord's priorities for us?

• To be salt and light behind in the world;

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

We all know that Christians are meant to reflect that light, that goodness in the world. In fact Jesus says we are the light, not we will become the light. So if the light is obscured, maybe it's time to get the duster out and wipe off the grime. And if that's not enough, it may be an overhaul of the whole fitting is overdue!

As important, perhaps more importantly from our position as lawyers, is the need to be salt, rubbed into culture and preserving society, working behind what Chuck Colson calls, enemy lines. There has been a recent series running on BBC2 about the SOE during World War 2, detailing the exploits and effect of agents work behind enemy lines in Europe over 5 years of war. When the nation's back was against the wall, it used 2000 brave men and women to infiltrate and attack strategic enemy targets.

When I was in practice, I finally listened to the Lord who had been nudging me (actually by this stage he was hammering at the door) to manage people differently. I well remember going into the managing partner's office and beginning with the words, "You really are not going to understand this, but I cannot go on managing the department in this way..."

The problem was the incessant time and money targets, monthly calls from the managing partners telling people they had

failed to meet them, judging everyone almost exclusively on what their billable hours were.

He tried to listen. God bless him, as I said I was going to do things differently and if that affected the team's performance then he could deal with me at the end of the financial year. His eyes completely glazed over when I said that money didn't matter to me as much as being the person God called me to be!

Performance in business does matter of course, but the way we achieve it matters more.

We should not be accommodating our culture, nor should we love the world, or its god, money. "You are the salt of the earth." Jesus says in Matt 5:13. Just as the meat in 1st century Jerusalem decayed without salt as a preservative, so will our society. Light and salt are our character traits in Christ. We will shine in a dark world and we will penetrate every aspect of life, preserving and seasoning our society.

• Taking our opportunities where we find them;

Out in the country, where the prospects for smaller firms and the older 1 & 2 man partnerships are much worse than in the larger cities, there is a propensity to bemoan the way things are moving. To see change as too fast, too hard on people, too expensive to compete with.

I've been re reading Acts recently. I wonder how many times Paul was racked with the same doubts about survival, the same desire to allow self concern its head! I'm sure he was. He was only human. Yet from Paul we learn, even today. From God's hand come the gift of opportunities. Those opportunities reveal themselves in life itself, where difficulties are there to be overcome, and in change, where He calls for repentance and a new direction. Increasingly within this radical evolution within our society, there are opportunities to rebuild local community church, and even a community of lawyers being salt and light in a dark and secular legal environment.

That brings me to the fourth aspect of our calling:

• To let justice roll

"But let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream." Amos 5:24

This is our specific calling. We have been called into the law by a God who has a higher vision of justice than that contained in any court practice guide. Justice is about more than law and yet if even we Christian lawyers cannot grasp and work toward Kingdom values, what hope is there for our nation?

"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

How?

"Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other." Zechariah 7:9,10.

This speaks to some real issues in today's society:

True kingdom justice. What about the influence money has on the quality of justice, both here and abroad? What about single parent families, asylum seekers, tragic cases, like that of the Siamese twins, ordinary every day cases, like the council house tenant who is being harassed or even hounded out because he or she doesn't look like or act like his neighbours? What about the disabled and the poor. What are we doing? What about the concept of world-wide justice for the poorer nations where slavery is again becoming prevalent in order to feed lower prices to consumers in the west. What about the issue of debt relief? Is it still on the political agenda? While we talk, others suffer.

"The righteous care about justice for the poor." Proverbs 29:7

Gary Haugen of the International Justice Mission, a lawyer, says:
"Our calling does not stop with sharing the good news. All of us are also called to do something to

care for the poor. ...And we are all called to do something to seek justice for the oppressed.... Truly we can't share the gospel with everyone, feed all the hungry, comfort all the afflicted or rescue all the oppressed, but all of us can, praise God, do something to advance these priorities of God."¹⁴

He goes on to talk about seasons of activity, but I want to impress upon you, this is what you were called to the law to do and you all have the ability to contribute in some way.

So, how can you, your chambers, your firm, be more involved in bringing justice to your community at work, in the nation or in the world?

First ask yourself the tough questions:

- Where do my priorities lie?
- What do I want God and people to know and remember me for?

For me, I can tell you, my priorities are:

1. Robert and the girls. Growing the girls has been our combined & most important project for the last 22 years
2. Taking risks for Christ. John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement in the US always spelt faith, RISK, and
3. To take a step forward each day for Christ. Small steps are perfectly acceptable and always honoured by the Lord.

Practically, what can the LCF do to help you fulfil your potential in the Lord?

We have plenty of areas in which you might like to be involved:

Law reforms: the first groups in family and crime are being gathered together this term to input on a specifically Christian legal level;

Pastorally: specifically in the work place we have a structure set up to reach every member in their office at least 3 times a year, to encourage, check out any problems, to offer teaching and support to them and their colleagues;

International Justice: we will shortly be on the board of a new charity to further the work of the International Justice Mission,

which works for the oppressed throughout the world by providing advocates, often from the west, in specific cases, and by applying international pressure on the offending governments. We are also already closely connected with the Kenyan LCF and their pro bono work in the poorest communities in Mombasa and Nairobi. We hope to extend that to South Africa.

Evangelism: we are about to pull together teams for a major outreach by Luis Palau during our 150th anniversary year, 2002. In the mean time dinners and speaker meetings as well as ethical seminars abound.

How can you add to the work of the LCF?

You can give your prayer support or your legal expertise; there are a number of short term needs for legal missions (2 or 3 weeks at a time) both in Europe and further afield. Ask and we'll let you have details

Your encouragement is always valued. This job can be very isolating for those of us who are more used to the teamwork of a large practice. If we're going to work the same long hours and give the commitment you do to your work, it would be good to hear from people occasionally that something has struck them, or better still, one of their non-Christian colleagues.

You can also give your financial support.

The LCF's budget is explained within this issue, but just getting 3 of us around the country on a regular basis and funding the expenses of those who seek to be involved, is a costly affair. Our overall budget for the year 2001 will be around £150,000, and many in the organisation do not claim what they might and we all seek out the resources in the most efficient manner, possible.

There is very real reason for hope that you, in and through your work, can make a difference for Christ, both individually and in fellowship with other lawyers. With Christ as our pupil master, how can we fail?