

# Opening of the Legal Year Address...cont.

an outlawed sect, breaking the law every time they met together, accused of cannibalism, sedition, and licentious practises. After all, they preached free love, they gave their allegiance to God alone, and they ate the body and blood of Jesus. It was only a death bed conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine - or better, his superstitious decision to have a bet each way when a vision of a Christian symbol was received as a portent of a successful battle - that finally Christianity became adopted as a State endorsed religion, and its observance no longer a criminal offence. Throughout the world, and throughout the ages, Christian martyrs and statesmen have stood against the laws of their day in their obedience to God's law of love. But don't be fooled into thinking such decisions come easily to the Christian community, then or now. When my church gave office space and some support to the Pine Gap four last year, we did it with mixed feelings. While we affirmed their stand against warfare in all its forms and guises, we struggled with their methods of opposition which broke secular laws. It is a struggle Christians have had from earliest

times.

St Paul's letters in the new testament endlessly wrestle with a Christians' responsibility to the law: religious law and secular law. 'Become all things to all people', he advises an outlawed church, in order not to draw attention and condemnation. Fit in, observe the laws of your government and culture, don't provoke persecution. It is in this light that we should read his affirmations of slavery, and his refusal to let women act or dress differently to community standards within the church community. But he was not completely happy with such wholesale accommodation to the social norms of the day. That after all, was not what Christianity was about. It proclaimed a new order, the reign of God, where peace, justice and compassion ruled instead of war, oppression and legalism. And so he also wrote about Christian freedom: freedom to become slaves to one another, freedom to 'love your neighbour as yourself,' freedom to act out love like Jesus did, even when it was illegal. And finally, after much torturous first century roman and semitic legalese, he hit on the

perfect balance between the order of the law, and the freedom to love. Jesus' law of love, he proclaimed, was the fulfilment of the law. Not a replacement for it, but its ultimate goal. Love for one another was what all laws aimed at. Jesus showed how it could be done.

By holding the worth and dignity of the human person as paramount in every case: the worth and dignity of the victim, the worth and dignity of the offender, the worth and dignity of the magistrate, the worth and dignity of the prosecutor, the worth and dignity of every worker, every member of the public, every family member, everyone who will come through the doors of this courthouse this year.

Jesus forgave the dying criminal hanging next to him on the cross, as he conferred blessing on the Roman soldier standing guard at his execution. We are called to love every neighbour we rub shoulders with here in this court. That is the fulfilment of the law: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. Amen.

## CONFERENCES

12 - 14 May 2008  
**Australian Winter School**  
**"Seen & Unseen Harms"**  
 Brisbane  
 Families & AOD  
 Workplace AOD  
 Social Exclusion

Brings together professionals addressing alcohol and other drugs across health, education, law enforcement, corrections, policy and research.  
[www.winterschool.info](http://www.winterschool.info)

26-27 June 2008  
**4th AIJA Law & Technology Conference**  
 Sydney  
 Australian Institute of

Judicial Administration,  
 AustLII, University of  
 NSW  
[www.lawtech2008.org](http://www.lawtech2008.org)

9-11 July 2008  
**10th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference 'Families Through Life'**  
 Australian Government,  
 Australian Institute of Family Studies  
 Melbourne Exhibition Centre  
 Email: [info@aifsconference08.com](mailto:info@aifsconference08.com)

13 - 16 July 2008  
**Third International Legal Ethics Conference**  
 Host: UQ and Griffith

University  
 Venue: Sheraton Mirage,  
 Gold Coast  
 Email: [legalethics@griffith.edu.au](mailto:legalethics@griffith.edu.au)

26-27 July 2008  
**LAWASIA IT Seminar**  
 (Host: LAWASIA,  
 LAWASIA India Chapter)  
 Hyderabad, India (details tbc)

3 - 5 August 2008  
**International Conference on Child Labour and Child Exploitation**  
 Host: Children's Rights International  
 Venue: Cairns Convention

Centre, Qld, Australia  
[www.childjustice.org/wsecl/default.htm](http://www.childjustice.org/wsecl/default.htm)

8-10 October 2008  
**ANZELA 17th Annual Conference**  
 Lawyers and educators working together.  
 Christchurch, New Zealand  
[www.anzela.edu.au](http://www.anzela.edu.au)  
[cle@lawyers.org.nz](mailto:cle@lawyers.org.nz)

29 October - 1 November 2008  
**21st LAWASIA Conference**  
 (Host: LAWASIA and Malaysian Bar Council)  
 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia