

Admissions Ceremony

16 JULY 2001

Chief Justice's observations

On behalf of the Judges, I congratulate you, ladies and gentlemen, upon your admission to the legal profession. Lord Maugham described lawyers some decades ago, and his words are as apt today, as “the custodians of civilisation, than which there can be no higher or nobler duty”. It is unsurprising that, in recent world history, crumbling regimes should have been looking to talented lawyers for their rescue. This is not empty grandiloquence: you do, now, become part of the mechanism which guards the lynchpin of our civil society, the rule of law, and I admonish you to take that responsibility seriously.

What distinguishes a profession is an ideal of public service. What distinguishes the legal profession is the lawyer's predominant duties to the law and the court: you now undertake faithfully to maintain the existing law and assist in its enforcement; and while you are bound to do your best to advance the interests of your clients, you are subject to at least a very strict negative duty, to refrain from obstructing the administration of justice by deceiving the court. We expect much of you: integrity, legal understanding, sound judgment, practical wisdom, and not the least, moral courage – we expect this depth of character and learning so that you will best serve the people who will depend on your expert capacities for the resolution of their difficulties.

Over the last few years, the managerial need for solicitors and their clerks to complete “time sheets” for client billing purposes, and other features of modern practice, have provoked consideration of whether business considerations have displaced professional considerations. There have been recent suggestions that Judges' remuneration be tied in some unspecified way to questions of “productivity” – and I have spoken of that elsewhere. I am diverted to acknowledge that my colleagues and I, hearing here some 90 cases in all today, and all of them significant, will not expect 90 times the remuneration of the Judge who hears but one case in the court next door! Evaluating judicial performance, your future professional performance, is a more fundamental exercise – essentially, dedication to the oaths which so concisely encapsulate our respective duties.

If you do not enter into legal practice as such, I hope you will nevertheless continue to draw inspiration from the jurisprudential training which has led you to this point: it should have induced a dimension of mental acuity and moral perception of enduring value.

Chief Justice's observations

As you rightly bask today in the lustre of your achievements, and we particularly note the brilliance of the honours graduates, and with pleasure, the admission of former associates, remember not only those you are destined to serve, but also those who have helped you to the position you now enjoy, especially your parents, families and friends. I hope they will remain, for you, important sources of encouragement and wise counsel.

You go forward now with our congratulations and best wishes.
