



## **Loaves and Fishes Luncheon St John's Cathedral Wednesday, 21 June 2006**

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**The Hon P de Jersey AC,  
Chief Justice**

Your Grace, Mr Dean, Mr Walker, Your Honours, ladies and gentlemen,

My "day job" sees me in an institution which in some respects remotely resembles this: our mission is very important, we operate in an environment hallowed by the tradition of centuries, we have the capacity vitally to affect people's lives, and we feel constrained to wear a distinctive uniform.

Now there is, you will immediately respond, one immediately obvious point of distinction: very infrequently a judge may pontificate; whereas clergy never do.

But there are three points of particular distinction between our courts of law and this emanation of the Christian mission. In the first place, there is the necessary separation of church and state, a point of which the humanists annually remind me when I announce the opening of the law year church service. Second, and in the ultimate sense, the mission of the church is ineffable, that of the courts but secular. Third, and you have been waiting I am sure for me to say this – there is some scope for a view that there is a degree of architectural disharmony between St John's Cathedral and the Supreme Courthouse in George Street.

Now I must be restrained and not use this platform to campaign for a new courthouse, and I need not do so, for the government has noted my importuning, and is moving to a new courthouse by the year 2011, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Supreme Court – not my new courthouse, but ours, and it will be superb.

But it will, and must, of course, be modern and contemporary, as is our approach to the delivery of justice according to law. The courts respect principle, while they at the same time incrementally develop the law where appropriate to reflect contemporary societal



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expectations. And there rests the point of critical distinction. The church's message is ageless, needing no modification with the passage of years, decades, centuries...

The great cathedrals of Europe are ancient institutions. Even many in America are by now very old. Yet they all continue to inspire, and grandly. This cathedral is a "mere" 100 years old. But throughout that century, it has fed knowledge, inspiration and renewal.

I have utter confidence it will do so while ever it stands. And how much enhanced its capacity to inform, inspire and renew, when it presents as complete.

It is a matter of fervent excitement that we now see, thanks to the generous commitment of so many, the prospect of actual completion.

And not just completion, but completion faithful to John Loughborough Pearson's design. When the Duke who became King George V laid the foundation stone in 1901, realists would have frankly conceded a likelihood economies would mean the construction would have to compromise that design. But remarkably, there has been virtually no compromise. To fulfil the Pearson vision, we have struggled along many arduous stretches, beginning with the basic need even to train our own masons in medieval techniques. How amazing to contemplate that each of these stones has been hand finished. Of course there has been much hand-wringing over priorities, in the decision to commit to this mammoth construction. But there can ultimately be no real question about the justification for the endeavour. There is the underlying historical significance, in actually completing the last French gothic style cathedral in the world. Surely we must be grand enough as 21<sup>st</sup> century human beings to see that accomplished.

Then there is the superveningly important spiritual accomplishment. And finally there is the abiding feature that this is a place of inspiration for all people, even, dare I suggest, our most arid humanist. It is a domain where spirituality and creativity correlate, to uplift the entire community.



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I find myself leading now the construction of a new Supreme and District Courthouse for the people of South East Queensland. It will be appropriately utilitarian, certainly progressive, and even inspirational. It is overdue, and will on that account be especially appreciated. It will reassure the people that the State accords appropriate recognition to the delivery of justice according to law.

But here we are, on a vastly different plane, assisting with something infinitely more reassuring and inspiring: the completion of a Christian cathedral of ancient lineage. The message delivered in this place guarantees mercy, not constrained by human frailty, but pledged by what the Dean recently and startlingly termed "the foolish and profligate love of God". The relevance of that message does not depend on any recurrent massaging through 21<sup>st</sup> century revisionism.

People of all persuasions, Queenslanders, Australians, and a constant stream of visitors from overseas, will be entranced and enlivened by the imminent fulfilment of what is, in this year 2006, a truly remarkable phenomenon. We are all immensely privileged to be participants in it.