

"Why the Study of Law is Important"

The Opening of the University of Queensland's T C Beirne School of Law's newly renovated West Wing of the Forgan Smith Building

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**The Hon Susan Kiefel
Chief Justice of Australia**

The entrance to this Law School, the T C Beirne School of Law, is engraved with the names of Aristotle, Socrates, Edward Coke, Francis Bacon, William Blackstone and Thomas Hobbes. Inside are busts of Plato and of Justinian. These great legal and social philosophers of the past had in common an understanding of why the law, and the study of it, is important. That importance may be considered from two perspectives: what the law provides society and how the study of law benefits the individual.

Justinian, Plato and Aristotle understood that law is essential to good governance and the preservation of social order. Aristotle said that the administration of justice, through law, is the principle of order in political society¹.

Hobbes differed from Plato and Aristotle in his conception of the true authority of the law as independent of justice. This was not to deny its importance. Law, he said, is "the public conscience" by which a man undertakes to be guided.

Law has often been described as that which binds a society. Speaking on the occasion of the 90th Anniversary of Vanderbilt University, in 1963, John F Kennedy observed that "law is the adhesive force in the cement of society, creating order out of chaos and coherence in place of anarchy"².

Given the importance of the law to the maintenance of our society, it is obvious that the study of it is essential. Even if a student does not later practise the law, the study of it will make them a better citizen.

It has long been recognised that legal training is an invaluable intellectual discipline of a special kind. The study of law develops particular skills in a student. Blackstone, like many others, did not consider that the benefits of legal studies were confined to those which accrue from its practice. Learning the law and the methods of solving legal problems develop analytical skills, an understanding of the written word

and its interpretation. A student learns the ability to present arguments and precision of expression. The study of law has been described as a "training in logic" and its methods of solution "processes of analogy, discrimination and deduction". It is this training which explains why law is the choice of so many students, both from Australia and overseas. It provides the best foundation for any number of different careers.

Speeches about the study of law are often given at the opening of law schools. This occasion is no less significant. We may shortly see the changes which have been made to the physical architecture of this Law School. If a modern law school seeks to draw people to it, to teach, to research and to study, it must provide a place which is the epitome of functionality. It must ensure that the design of its physical features reflects the modernity and organisational principles of the Law School and, at the same time, the enduring nature of the law. Knowing the Dean of this Law School, as I do, I have no doubt that the new look Law School will achieve all of these things.

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, 1253a.31.

² John F Kennedy, "An Address by the President of the United States Commemorating the Founding of the University: The Educated Citizen's Responsibility in an Age of Change" (1963) 17 *Vanderbilt Law Review* 171 at 174. See also Glanville Williams, *Learning the Law* (11th ed, London Stevens and Sons, 1982) 1.