

"REMEMBER YOUR HUMANITY, FORGET THE REST"

Justice David Angel called on three newly admitted practitioners to remember their humanity in the practice of law at an admission ceremony in the Supreme Court in Darwin on Tuesday 3 July 2001. The judge's address is reprinted here in full.

The court congratulates each of you on being admitted as practitioners of the court. This is the culmination of years of legal study and you now have entered the Northern Territory legal profession.

The Northern Territory legal profession practices in a jurisdiction that is very young. Just to put that into perspective, I note that Mr Wallbridge went to a school in South Australia founded in 1847, some years before Darwin settled by white man.

You may have noticed when you came into the court that there are a substantial number of Aboriginal works of art hanging in the court. Many of those works of art are desert art, and in particular by members of the Pintubi tribe from that remote area west of Alice Springs that crosses into Western Australia. The last of the Pintubi tribe came in from the desert as recently as 1983.

Robert Hughes, the renowned art critic, once said that people who say they get a moral uplift from looking at art work are kidding themselves. If it were true, he said, all art critics would be saints: as he said, "we are not". We must ever remember, when considering works of art — be they paintings; be it music; be it any other form of art — that that monster Himmler in the Second World War used to listen to the magnificent music of Beethoven and Wagner before he went off to the gas ovens every morning.

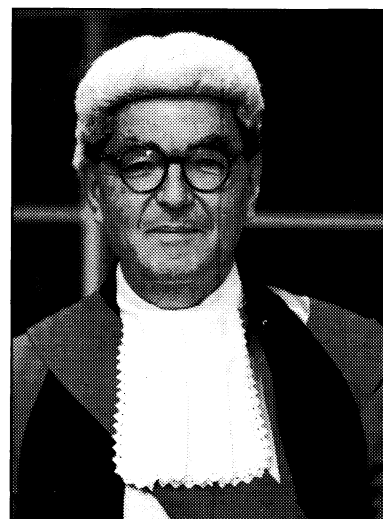
You may remember the line from an Australian poet: "From the desert the prophets came". The Pintubi, as I said, are from the desert and the last of them came in as recently as 1983. Their artworks are now applauded worldwide. "Why is this so?" as a

physicist once said. The key to the greatness of these artworks is their self-evident authority and underlying spirituality. Religious ideas in these post-modern times are, of course, out of fashion. The contemporary intelligentsia considers religious and spiritual belief a sure sign of a narrow mind and a source of intolerance somehow indicative of a lesser intelligence. Let me put that nonsense to rest.

That famous Edwardian G.K Chesterton said, in a 1905 publication called *Heretics*:

Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas. As he piles doctrine on doctrine and conclusion on conclusion in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion, he is, in the only legitimate sense of which the expression is capable, becoming more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism; when he declines to tie himself to a system; when he says that he has outgrown definitions; when he said that he disbelieves in finality; when in his own imagination he sits as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, then he is by that very process, sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of the grass. Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broad-minded.

This passage contains a very important idea — the idea that humanity can not flourish in a moral vacuum. It was the



philosopher Bertrand Russell who said: "Remember your humanity, forget the rest".

The Pintubi works of art hanging outside on the wall are self-evidently sustained by reference to a deep religious belief. They triumphantly spring from humanity. They are a reminder to us all of our need to find and remember and manifest our own humanity. Remember your humanity in whatever you do in the practice of the law, quite apart from your strict legal duty (to say nothing of your moral duty) of absolute honesty in all your dealings with your clients, your fellow practitioners and with the court.

Remember your humanity.

The court congratulates you on being admitted as practitioners of the court and wishes you well.

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