

The Honourable Roderick Pitt Meagher

The degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon The Honourable Roderick Pitt Meagher, BA LLB, by the Chancellor Emeritus Professor Dame Leonie Kramer AC at a Law ceremony held in the Great Hall on 19 May 2000.



The Chancellor Emeritus Professor Dame Leonie Kramer AC and The Honourable Roderick Pitt Meagher, *photo, Tracey Schramm, 'The University of Sydney News', 1 June 2000, University of Sydney Archives.*

Citation

Chancellor

I have the honour to present the Honourable Mr Justice Roderick Pitt Meagher for the conferring of the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*).

Justice Meagher graduated from this University Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws with First Class Honours. In the late 1950s in times of great student unrest, he was elected Fellow of the Senate representative of the undergraduates by mischievously posing as a student radical. In 1960 he also entered upon a long period of service as a part time lecturer to the Faculty of Law. He lectured in Roman Law and was appointed Challis Lecturer in Equity. His lectures were a constant source of inspiration, delight and guidance for generations of law students.

He has co-authored two important legal texts which have become part of the essential library of every serious legal scholar, judge, and practitioner in Australia. I refer to *Equity Doctrines and Remedies*, which he wrote jointly with Justice Gummow of the High Court and Justice Lehane of the Federal Court, and *Jacobs on Trusts* of which he has co-edited the second to the sixth editions.

This work as a lecturer and text-writer was performed in the midst of an intense practice at the Bar where Justice Meagher was soon to become one of the nation's leaders in appellate advocacy. His excellence at the Bar was recognised successively by his appointment as one of Her Majesty's Counsel, election as a member of the New South Wales Bar Council, and as its President in 1979-1981.

In 1989 Justice Meagher was appointed as a Judge of Appeal of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. His arrival on that distinguished Court was greeted with anxiety in some quarters because he had only lately described his experience of appearing there "before those three Communists". However he soon confounded all expectations by getting on well with his colleagues - even referring occasionally to international human rights law.

Justice Meagher's qualities as a judge have been specially appreciated by law students because if the

succinctness of his opinions and the sharp phrases which he often deploys against those of contrary views. Sometimes it is necessary to consult a dictionary, as when he describes an opinion with which he disagreed as a "rodomontade". As an after dinner speaker he is much in demand. It is best that his enemies attend such dinners in the hope of dissuading him from his less charitable comments. His cousin, Patrick White, for example, was denounced by him as a "curmudgeon wearing a tea cosy". The Nobel Laureate died soon after this insult.

However, Chancellor, it is likely that Justice Meagher's lasting reputation will attach to his scholarly legal texts, and particularly *Equity Doctrines and Remedies*. That book has probably enjoyed greater esteem than any other Australian legal treatise, not only in universities but also with the Bench and Bar in this country, England and elsewhere. There is no equivalent to it in England, the United States or anywhere else. Its publication helped reverse the general decline of equity and signalled a rebirth of its influence. For his part in that text alone, and as a distinguished alumnus of this University, Justice Meagher's intellectual contributions to the law deserve special recognition.

Justice Meagher has not interested himself in sport. He potters around art galleries and acquires the odd painting or two. He is a vivid conversationalist, raconteur and droll humorist. He has no time for political correctness, beer, barbecues, thongs, sun bathing or law reformers. He is a living illustration of the way this University disdains compulsory orthodoxy and encourages those who stand against the tide, even when the tide reaches tsunami proportions.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting a former Fellow of the Senate of this University, scholar, lawyer, judge and individualist - the Honourable Mr Justice Roderick Pitt Meagher for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.