

John Finnis citation

Saturday 6th of May 2017

11:00am – Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present to you Professor John Finnis.

The Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) is being awarded to Professor Finnis in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the philosophy of law.

His work on the tradition of natural law and natural rights has transformed the study of jurisprudence across the world. His body of work cements his status as one of the Adelaide Law School's leading academic alumni. He has contributed to important moral and legal issues such as the regulation of medical services, human relations and religious freedom.

Born in Adelaide in 1940, John Mitchell Finnis attended St Peter's College and completed his Bachelor of Laws degree with honours at the University of Adelaide in 1961. His family is distinguished by its connections to the University. For instance, his maternal grandfather, John McKellar Stewart, was the Professor of Philosophy in the University, before becoming its Vice-Chancellor.

An outstanding student, Professor Finnis was awarded the Rhodes scholarship for South Australia in 1962. He attended University College, Oxford where he obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in 1965. The title of his thesis was, *The Idea of Judicial Power, with special reference to Australian Constitutional Law*.

Professor Finnis began his academic career at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1965. In 1966, he returned to University College, Oxford as a Fellow and Praelector in Jurisprudence, a position he held until 2010. He also served the University College as Vice-Master from 2001 until 2010. In 2010, he was named an Honorary Fellow.

Professor Finnis was appointed Lecturer in Law at Oxford University in 1967. In 1970, he was admitted to the English Bar. From 1972 until 1989, Professor Finnis was the Rhodes Reader in Laws of British Commonwealth and United States. In 1989, he was appointed to the personal chair of Professor of Law and Legal Philosophy. In 2010, he was appointed Professor Emeritus.

In the 1980s, Professor Finnis served as an adviser to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, Westminster. He has also served as a member of the Catholic Bishops' Joint Committee on Bio-Ethical Issues. In 1990, he was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy.

Among his many other appointments, Professor Finnis has held positions at the University of Malawi and Boston College Law School. He has been a visiting lecturer in law in this University. Notably, since 1995, he has been the Biolchini Family Professor of Law at The University of Notre Dame in the United States. His postgraduate students came from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Ireland, Argentina and Brazil; they now hold senior academic, judicial, ecclesial and professional positions around the world.

Professor Finnis has amassed a large body of influential work over his career. His masterwork, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, was first published in 1980. It remains in print 37 years later, and is still contributing to the ongoing debate on the philosophy of law. This work was described by Professor Robert George from Princeton as the book to revive scholarly interest in the venerable,

but deeply misunderstood, idea of natural law and rights... but it also powerfully challenged dominant ways of thinking among philosophers of law and morality.

In 2011, Oxford University Press published 5 volumes of Professor Finnis's Collected Essays. The themes of the volumes cover practical reason, intention and identity, human rights and the common good, the philosophy of law and religion and public reasons. In addition, the Press republished *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, together with a retrospective essay by its author. Each volume has a cover picture taken from the Art Gallery of South Australia that serves as a symbol for the themes it explores.

It gives me great pleasure to present to you Professor John Finnis, Bachelor of Laws (honours), Doctor of Philosophy, for admission to the honorary degree of Degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).