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## INTERESTING TIMES

It is rather difficult to conceive of any issue relating to either the Institute or the Society for Advanced Legal Studies which will be significantly affected by our inexorable progression from the year 1999 to a new millennium. Even those of us who would ordinarily attribute some spiritual or transcendental significance to this event, must in all honesty admit there is a good argument that we have either already missed the passing of the 2000 anniversary of Christ's birth by at least four years, or if we are merely concerned with accurate counting, that the appropriate time for celebrating would be next year. Nonetheless, it would be somewhat churlish to remain entirely aloof from the fervour that appears to be gripping the government, and even to some degree the legal profession, if no one else.

Such an event is a good time to look both back and forward. It was only three years ago that the Institute celebrated its own jubilee. Since then, the Institute has been absorbed with its future and in particular the enterprise to expand its activities into a new building. Although the Institute's history is but a small part of the jigsaw which constitutes the developing structure of our legal system, and for that matter the legal system of a number of other Commonwealth jurisdictions, we are modestly proud of the service that the Institute has given during the last half of this century. There is every hope, and indeed expectation, that the Institute and now the Society will play an even more significant role in the years to come. Professor Goode's Committee, which reviewed the structure and work of the Institute, provides us in its report with valuable suggestions for enhancing the IALS's research activities even further. In addition to making a number of new senior appointments, the Institute has developed plans to work much more closely with some of the leading universities around the world, and in particular in the USA.

The Institute's library has long recognised the need to address developments in information technology, and has already initiated a number of important programmes designed to facilitate the deployment and utilisation of new systems of retrieval of and access to legal information. Undoubtedly technology will continue to impact on scholarship and legal research. It is possible that the process of developing and applying principles by analogy will play a less significant role, given the ability of researchers to access a mass of authority and identify specifically fact-relevant decisions. Whether this will be an entirely welcome development remains to be seen.

The impact of the electronic communication systems which provide on-line information and transactional services in so many areas of the law is well appreciated. The description of cyberspace in almost physical terms is a misleading, albeit comfortable, approach. The danger lies in us not developing radical and appropriate principles of law which are appropriate for a modern world in which globalisation and electronic communications have fundamentally affected so many areas of activity. For example, if we cannot get those responsible for drafting and implementing the criminal law to contemplate the impact on, say the civil law, our ability to pursue a more radical agenda in dealing with technology may not serve us well. This is most graphically illustrated in, for instance, the debate on the efficacy of anti-money laundering law, a topic in which the Institute and its researchers have taken a special interest. What is certain is that in the law we will continue to live in 'interesting times'!

**Professor Barry Rider**