

AN INVITATION TO THE LAW. By C.G. WEERAMANTRY. [Sydney: Butterworths. 1982. xiv+370 pp.]

THIS interesting and unusual book is designed for students for whom a “proper understanding of the legal enterprise” would be beneficial. The author, Professor of Law at Monash University and formerly a Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, regrets that many law students, who may well become extremely competent legal technicians, do not take or are not offered courses during their legal training in legal history, jurisprudence or comparative law. They can thus graduate unaware of the political, cultural or social value of their chosen discipline. This book is intended to give such students at least a survey of some of the topics typically covered in such courses. It therefore includes, *inter alia* a comparison of the world’s great legal traditions from ancient times until the present, outlines of the works of leading jurists, philosophers, political scientists and religious writers, discussions on the nature and purposes of law, its sources and the basic legal concepts, and the historical development of legal institutions and procedures. All the selected topics are presented succinctly with an indication of the areas of controversy and often of the lines of debate. The contents demonstrate the inextricable interweaving of legal history, jurisprudence and comparative law, for many of the issues are raised in more than one place. This is especially true of the description of the modern development of a law to protect fundamental human rights which is described from the political, theoretical, practical and historical aspects so as to give a good illustration of how law can be utilised as an instrument of control and development in new areas. This idea is supplemented by a concluding chapter on potential new directions for the law.

Professor Weeramantry does not attempt to cover anything in detail; rather he aims to stimulate the reader and in effect he “issues an invitation” to pursue an active interest in the law in its social, environmental, political and historical context, as well as its influence on, and interaction with, other disciplines far removed from the traditional law school curriculum, *e.g.*, theology, linguistics and architecture. Acceptance of the invitation is facilitated by the inclusion of a brief bibliography on each subject at the end of the book.

The book is also enriched by the appendices of primary source materials of a type not often found in law books. The materials are drawn from ancient and more modern times, religious and secular writings and from all parts of the world and branches of legal thinking. Their very diversity illustrates the recurrence in all societies of some of the major legal dilemmas as well as the varying responses to those dilemmas.

Professor Weeramantry entered into an ambitious undertaking to present so much in a precise, readable and stimulating way. He has succeeded admirably.

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