

## EDITORIAL

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WILL ADAM

The daughter of the emperor thus addressed Rabbi Joshua, the son of Chananiah: ‘O! how great is thy skill in the law, and yet how deformed thou art! What a great deal of wisdom is laid up in a sordid vessel!’ The rabbi answered, ‘Tell me, I pray thee, of what are those vessels in which you keep your wines?’ She answered, ‘They are earthen vessels.’ He replied, ‘How is it, seeing ye are rich, that ye do not lay up your wine in silver vessels, for the common people lay up their wine in earthen vessels?’ She returned to her father, and persuaded him to have all the wine put into silver vessels; but the wine turned acid; and when the emperor heard it he inquired of his daughter who it was that had given her that advice? She told him that it was Rabbi Joshua. The rabbi told the whole story to the emperor, and added this sentence: ‘The wisdom and study of the law cannot dwell in a comely man.’ Caesar objected, and said, ‘There are comely persons who have made great progress in the study of the law.’ The rabbi answered, ‘Had they not been so comely they would have made greater progress; for a man who is comely has not an humble mind, and therefore he soon forgets the whole law.’

This rabbinical tale is gleaned from the work of the nineteenth-century controversial Irish Methodist theologian Adam Clarke. It is at the same time an object lesson in the storage of wine and a warning not to get too hung up on appearances and the allure of beauty.

Since the very beginning of the life of this *Journal*, now thirty years old and into its twentieth volume, a central part of each issue, albeit more often than not bringing up the rear, has been the Case Notes. From the days before neutral citations and electronic publication and dissemination of Consistory and Commissary Court cases, the Case Notes in the *Journal* provided an overview of such cases and allowed all those who were interested a glimpse into the life of the ecclesiastical courts’ jurisdiction and case law. They have, over the years, allowed counsel, registrars, archdeacons, students and anyone interested to know where to look to find out more about a particular case or subject area. Regular readers will recall reading cases about the disposal (or

otherwise) of chattels, including previous silver. This present issue includes a detailed examination of the custody and disposal of church silver and other artefacts, written by Chancellor Philip Petchey.

Central to argument about the sale of silver has been the question of sacred use. Many church treasures have been donated to churches to enhance worship and to give glory to God. As chancellors down the years have found, there is a balance to be struck between this and the occasional pressing needs for assets to be realised. While, following the reasoning of the wise rabbi in the story above, it is the case that the principal treasure in Christian life is not silver or gold but the good news of the gospel, yet honour is done to God in worship through the beauty of holiness.

The constant need for wisdom in the application of the law will not go away. Chancellors continue to require the wisdom of Solomon. But it is well to remember, if readers will excuse a little editorial sermonising, that, ultimately, the treasure that the church has been given is just as precious when held in 'jars of clay' (2 Corinthians 4:7).