

Faith in the Future: Ray Wilson's speech, Friday 14 November 2008

I have been asked to say a few words on bequests as I have already announced that my late partner James Agapitos and I decided to include the National Gallery in our wills.

Most people approach the subject of their will with varying degrees of trepidation. They don't want to tempt fate by thinking about their mortality, which, despite all the advances in medicine, is inevitable, and having a will and being dead are the necessary parts of making and realising a bequest.

I have had no trepidation and I will admit to having fun writing my will.

If you discuss the subject of wills you will hear the usual platitudes: 'You can't take it with you', 'Blood is thicker than water', 'You can't rule from the grave' and so on.

I won't dispute 'You can't take it with you' and I suppose blood is thicker than water and our families generally have a right to expect something from our estates but, frankly, to leave everything to family is the easy option.

Your will is your final opportunity to have the last word, without anyone having the right of reply, and to make positive statements about what you believe in and what you cherished during your life.

It is your chance to recognise the kindness of friends and to say thank you to the cultural institutions that have contributed to your quality of life.

I specify cultural institutions because, after family, health and welfare are usually the next choices; the organisations that have enriched our lives can be forgotten. I will add that you shouldn't keep your bequests a secret from the institutions you are considering. Talk to them so they can manage your generosity in the best possible way while, at the same time, producing the results you desire; so you can 'rule from the grave' as well.

Another platitude relating to money is 'you can't have your cake and eat it'. When it comes to a bequest to a cultural institution you can eat cake for the rest of your life.

By making a notified bequest you can be certain they will be a grateful beneficiary and will ensure you continue to enjoy your association with them until the inevitable happens and they will honour you after you've gone.

I will add that neither James nor I approve of anonymous donations or bequests. This is a very outdated Victorian concept. We should be proud to stand up, or be laid out,

and say we believe in this institution and encourage, or challenge, friends, relatives, associates and competitors to follow suit.

In this beautiful booklet announcing the establishment of the Bequest Circle I am quoted from the speech I made announcing James's and my bequest and I'd like to repeat it here.

'I am doing this in the hope that our example will encourage other supporters of the Gallery to follow suit and publicly demonstrate their faith in the future of this great, growing and exciting institution.'

Thank you.

Ray Wilson, OAM

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