

# NEW LAWYERS FOR A NEW CENTURY—LEGAL EXCELLENCE AND MORAL CLARITY: THE FOUNDING OF AVE MARIA SCHOOL OF LAW

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IT was shortly before Thanksgiving in 1998, as I was working quietly at my desk at Catholic University Law School, having recently been informed by the president of the university that I was to be renewed for another term as dean, when Thomas S. Monaghan, the founder and former owner of Domino's Pizza, called to ask me if I would leave Catholic University to start a brand new Catholic law school in Ann Arbor. He explained that he was selling most of his holdings in Domino's and intended to use a significant portion of proceeds of the sale to more deeply fund his foundation and to start, among other educational ventures, a new law school.<sup>1</sup> What did I think of the idea, he asked. My response, in essence, was that to start another law school, merely to have another law school and without a distinctive mission or purpose in mind, made little sense. We already had far too many lawyers produced by too many law schools indistinguishable from one another, I explained. If it was his intention, however, to create a different kind of law school, one with a distinctive mission and approach to legal education, I told him that was worth doing, particularly if it was provided with adequate financial resources. I stressed that there has been no lack of great visions for new and different kinds of law schools, but they usually do not develop beyond the articulation of the vision because they do not have sufficient financial support. Both vision and strong financial footing are absolutely necessary. Mr. Monaghan agreed and indicated that if I and the faculty could supply the vision and mission, he would provide very generous financial resources sufficient to make the law school a reality.

After further discussions with Mr. Monaghan over the next few weeks and a visit to his office in Ann Arbor, I finally agreed to leave Catholic University and to become the founding dean of Ave Maria School of Law.

On April 8, 1999, Mr. Monaghan's foundation, the Ave Maria Foundation, announced the formation of Ave Maria School of Law. It was scheduled to open in August 2000, would initially be funded by the financial generosity of the foundation, and would be governed and operated, not by a Catholic diocese or religious order like the more than twenty other Catholic law schools, but by an independent board of Catholic laity and clergy.

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1. Mr. Monaghan's interest in starting a law school at this time had been stimulated by a group of five faculty members from the University of Detroit Law School—Professors Stephen Safranek, Richard Myers, Mollie Murphy, Joseph Falvey and Laura Hirshfeld—who were dissatisfied with the direction of that law school, especially in its commitment to its Catholic identity. Not so coincidentally, I was responsible for their hiring when I was dean of the University of Detroit Law School from 1983–1995. I had also come to know Mr. Monaghan over the years—both in Detroit and in Washington—and knew that he and I shared many of the same views about education in general and legal education in particular.

Before the official announcement was made, however, many months of intensive discussion and planning went on regarding the nature of the school's mission and its aspirations. Two particular events are worth recounting. In late January 1999, I met with the founding faculty for a weekend planning session at the home of Professor Joseph Falvey.<sup>2</sup> The meeting focused not only on the mission and direction of the law school but on all the details necessary to create and operate a new law school; for example, the desired size of the school, the kind of students it wished to attract, the size of the faculty, and the contents of the curriculum. We paid particular attention to the ABA Standards for Approval of Law Schools and agreed that the goal was to meet and exceed those standards as quickly as possible. During a weekend brainstorming session in late March, we developed and fleshed out the plans outlined during the January deliberations. Approximately 25 people attended that meeting, including the founding faculty and a number of law professors, judges, practitioners, and university officials from around the country, many of whom had interest and experience in legal education or university education involving religiously affiliated institutions. From these sessions, the basic plan for the law school was developed and then refined into the self-study document required by the ABA for accreditation. That plan, with only a few minor modifications, remains the basic plan for the law school today as it welcomes its fifth entering class.

The model we developed for the law school during the discussions is one of *engagement* and is best described as follows: In this time of great challenges to legal education, there is much debate over how best to train men and women for the practice of law. We believe that our approach has much to offer legal education and we want to participate in that debate. We are confident that what we have to say is important for the future of legal education and fully expect that it will be received in a respectful manner, even by those who do not agree with it. At the same time, we do not wish to be defensive or apologetic about what we have to offer, nor do we wish to present it in a strident fashion. We expect to engage in the discussion with civility and respect for the views of others and expect the same in return.<sup>3</sup>

Two fundamental principles were agreed to in these early discussions and have guided the law school ever since. The first is to achieve recognition as a national

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2. Also participating in that meeting was the newly appointed dean of admissions, Michael Kenney, who served formerly as director of admissions at the University of Detroit Law School, and had joined with the original founding faculty in the presentation of its concept for a new Catholic law school to Mr. Monaghan the previous fall.

3. The basic idea for the *engagement* model was first articulated by Professor Robert George, who holds the McCormick Chair of Jurisprudence at Princeton University and directs its James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions. Professor George is also a member of the Ave Maria School of Law Board of Governors and participated in most of our discussions about the shape and direction of the law school.

Before selecting the *engagement* model, we rejected two other possible models for the law school. One was termed the *insular* model, where the law school, in essence, would pursue its religious mission in an inward looking fashion and seek not to sully itself by engaging the outside, secular world. The other model discussed was the *accommodationist* model. Under this model, the law school, although nominally Catholic in its affiliation, would downplay that aspect and seek to present itself in a more secular way in an attempt to gain greater secular acceptance for its program. We found both the *insular* and the *accommodationist* models incompatible with what we were seeking to achieve.

institution and to provide an academic and professional legal education of the highest caliber. The students at Ave Maria Law School would receive training in the technical and professional skills necessary to become outstanding lawyers, enabling them to compete with graduates from the nation's best law schools.

The second foundational principle is that the law school would operate in the context of the Catholic intellectual tradition, a 2000-year-old tradition that provides a rich heritage of thought based on the harmony of faith and reason. Both the Anglo-American common law system and the civil law system have their roots in the ecclesiastical law developed by the early Church Fathers. University legal education, in fact, began in the medieval Catholic universities, and Catholic law schools ever since have been the bearers of a tradition that safeguards the dignity of the human person and the common good. The tradition is one grounded in the thought of such great philosophers as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas and the well-developed, centuries-old teachings on social justice, which touch upon everything from what constitutes a just law to the requirements of meaningful work and a living wage. Particular inspiration is drawn from the writings of Pope John Paul II, especially from his great encyclicals, many of which touch upon the relationship between culture and law such as *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and *Fides et Ratio*. The law school's motto, *Fides et Ratio*, is drawn from the encyclical of that name and is grounded in the belief that there is a harmony of faith and reason. Faith seeking understanding through reason is essential to discovering truth in its fullest sense. Both faith and reason have their origin in God and both are necessary in the pursuit of justice. *Fides et Ratio* expresses our conviction that faith and reason enhance the study of law and lead to a richer and fuller understanding of truth.

We believe that a commitment to academic and professional excellence within the context of and enhanced by the Catholic intellectual tradition is indispensable to the kind of legal education we seek to provide. A legal education that seeks to impart only professional competence without instilling a commitment to justice and a compassion for those served is a sterile and incomplete product. On the other hand, all the compassion and commitment to justice in the world without the requisite professional competence produces a fraud upon the public.<sup>4</sup> At Ave Maria School of Law, we realize that both qualities are indispensable for the well-trained modern lawyer.

From these two foundational principles, three other concomitant principles flow. The first is a belief that for a proper legal education, law and morality are linked and must be explored together. We recognize, in one sense, that they are distinct and inhabit separate spheres. Not every moral issue must somehow be addressed, resolved by, or reflected in the legal system, and not every legal issue has deep and profound moral implications. At a more fundamental level, however, at the core of the foundations of law, law and morality are inextricably intertwined and must be studied and examined in concert.

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4. The credit for these words expressing the linkage between professional competence and the commitment to justice belongs to Fr. Theodore Hesburg, the long-time and now retired president of the University of Notre Dame, who frequently asserted them in connection with Notre Dame Law School.

The second tenet derives from our belief that one of the great contributions of western civilization is the rule of law, and that the rule of law, properly understood, is necessary for a functioning liberal democracy. It is only through the rule of law that the inherent worth and dignity of every individual can be protected. Moreover, for the rule of law to provide that protection and to give the support needed for a functioning democracy, it must be grounded in something outside itself, something transcendent. That something transcendent is the natural law. The natural law, written on the heart of every human being and grounded in the notion that there are objective rights and wrongs, is the only secure foundation and basis for human freedom. Morality is not a relative concept that changes according to the whim or caprice of a particular majority, or the state or direction of a culture or a particular context. There are, in fact, objective moral truths and moral norms. The rule of law is necessary to protect the human rights that flow from the dignity of the human person, and these are rights that no just society can ever create, modify, or destroy.

Finally, we believe that the practice of law is a vocation or calling. Unfortunately, this sense of law as a vocation has been lost in the last few decades, as law is seen more and more as a business no different from any other. It is imperative that the sense of law as an important and meaningful vocation be regained. To that end, we seek to foster and restore this conception of the lawyer's role in society. As we seek to retrieve the once noble heritage of a lawyer, we hold up as our model Thomas More, the Great Lord Chancellor of England. More is celebrated today as the man of conscience who gave up his life rather than betray his beliefs. But Thomas More was more (no pun intended) than just a martyr; he was also the consummate professional lawyer who "in the thickets of the law [is] a forester ... [and there is not] a man alive who could follow [him] through those thickets."<sup>5</sup> In Robert Bolt's great play, *A Man For All Seasons*, that passage particularly illustrates More's lawyerly cast of mind. After being told by his son-in-law, Will Roper, that a new Oath of Supremacy was required, More's first reaction was to demand to hear the wording of the oath. Roper dismissively replied that "we don't need to know the wording—we know what it will mean!"<sup>6</sup> More's rejoinder was one that every lawyer can appreciate: "It will mean what the words say! An oath is *made* of words! It may be possible to take it. Or avoid it."<sup>7</sup> More, of course, after examining the oath, realized that he could not in good conscience take it. Even with all of his skills as a lawyer, he could not find a way of parsing the words in such a way as to satisfy his conscience. He thus refused to take it and refused to give the grounds for not taking it, thereby losing his head.

It is these foundational principles that underlie all of our activities at the law school. We have an unqualified commitment to academic and professional excellence, and we seek to provide a rigorous legal education characterized by a commitment to justice and to the highest ethical and moral standards. In addition to possessing the necessary technical skills, we ask our students to reflect critically on the law and their role within it. As my colleague Professor Richard Myers has

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5. ROBERT BOLT, *A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS* 66 (Random House, 1962) (1960).

6. *Id.* at 125. In the movie based on the play, these words were uttered by More's daughter Margaret and not Roper.

7. *Id.*

observed, we seek to accomplish this mission “by offering an intellectual culture that is different from that which characterizes most American law schools.” To illustrate this point, Professor Myers quotes from Roger Cramton’s famous law review article, *The Ordinary Religion of the Law School Classroom*,<sup>8</sup> written when he was the dean of the Cornell Law School. In pertinent part, Dean Cramton stated that certain “[m]odern dogmas entangle legal education—a moral relativism tending toward nihilism, a pragmatism tending toward an amoral instrumentalism, a realism tending toward cynicism, an individualism tending toward atomism, and a faith in reason and democratic processes tending toward mere credulity and idolatry.”<sup>9</sup>

To the contrary, argues Professor Myers, a Catholic law school can and should differ in every respect. “The intellectual culture of the Catholic law school will promote the integration of faith and reason, it will understand the social nature of man, it will affirm the necessity of examining the moral aspects of the study of law, it will affirm the ideal of law as a vocation (as a calling) and it will affirm the existence of truth and, in particular, moral truth. A Catholic legal education will aspire to that education described by Newman in the *Idea of a University*, in which ‘A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom....’”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most often asked question about Ave Maria School of Law is how it differs, if at all, from other Catholic or other religiously affiliated law schools. The simple and the best answer to that question derives from our approach to the curriculum. It should be noted at the outset that the curriculum very much resembles the standard curriculum found in most law schools. Contracts, Torts, Civil Procedure, Property, and Criminal Law, for example, are all required first-year courses. In addition, standard courses such as Business Organizations, Constitutional Law, Federal Taxation, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence are required for second- and third-year law students. Courses emphasizing professional skills and developing a deeper understanding of subjects such as criminal law, labor and employment law, tax, administrative law, intellectual property, and international law are also provided for upper-level students. By any traditional measure, the curriculum is a rigorous one, which provides a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of the various subject areas of the law. A total of 90 credit hours are necessary for graduation, including a core curriculum of required courses of 60 credit hours, 32 of which are required in the first year. It is a curriculum designed to develop the technical competence and professional skills necessary for the successful practice of law.

The difference in approach arises in several ways. First, the core curriculum contains courses that emphasize the moral foundations of the law, the Catholic Church’s teachings on social justice, and the natural law tradition. Thus, all first-year students are required to take a two-credit course entitled Moral Foundations of Law, and second- and third-year students are required to take courses in

8. Roger C. Cramton, *The Ordinary Religion of the Law School Classroom*, 29 J. LEGAL EDUC. 247 (1977-78).

9. *Id.* at 262.

10. Richard S. Myers (quoting JOHN HENRY CARDINAL NEWMAN, *THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY* 90 (Charles F. Harrold ed., Longmans, Green and Co. 1947) (1855)).

Jurisprudence, Professional Responsibility, and Law, Ethics, and Public Policy. All of these courses permit the students to examine the moral and ethical issues that exist in our legal system, to discuss the nexus between law and morality, and to focus on the interrelationship between law, ethics, and the Catholic intellectual tradition. The students are also asked to apply these principles to concrete legal problems.

The second difference in our approach to curriculum is perhaps the most distinctive feature of our program—and the one that particularly distinguishes or differentiates us from most other Catholic and other religiously affiliated law schools. Simply stated, it is the way we approach teaching all the courses in the curriculum, not just the four mentioned above. Each faculty member is asked to address moral and ethical issues that arise in his or her courses and to explore them where it is appropriate and relevant to do so in light of the moral and social teachings of the Catholic Church (and other religious traditions, if the faculty member wishes).

How does this approach work? A look at Property Law, one of the standard first year courses in the curriculum, illustrates how it is done. Students are not only exposed to the traditional elements found in a Property course, such as future interests and the Rule Against Perpetuities, but are also invited to examine the nature of property as revealed through traditional Catholic teachings, which emphasize that property has both an individual and a social character. While private ownership is a natural, necessary, and legitimate right fundamental for the autonomy and development of the person, it is not an absolute right, and the goods of the world are destined for the entire family of mankind. Students explore how an understanding of property is illumined and enriched by this Catholic understanding; for example, how traditional property concepts such as first-in-time occupancy, estates, leaseholds, servitudes, nuisance, takings, and zoning, can be understood according to natural justice and natural law. Catholic theories of property are also compared with other theories, such as economic utility (the bias of the property casebook used), social utility, labor theory, and radical attacks on property.

The casebook is also supplemented with a wide range of readings designed to introduce students to broader theories of property. Students read Bible verses on property, two questions on property from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Vatican statements on homelessness and on "property" in human organs, tissues, and stem cells, and lengthy excerpts from three papal encyclicals—*Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, and *Centesimus Annus*. Cases are also provided on slavery, frozen embryos, and same-sex marriage as an avenue for discussion of property and human rights in these areas. Finally, students are given excerpts from several theorists, such as Locke, Blackstone, Rousseau, Bentham, Proudhon, and Marx. The class is then urged to integrate this broader perspective on property with the traditional legal doctrines and substance that make up the first-year property course.<sup>11</sup>

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11. I am greatly indebted to Professor Howard Bromberg of the Ave Maria law faculty, and one of our property teachers, for this description of how he teaches property.

Similar descriptions and explanations can be used for most other courses. Although I said above that the moral and social teachings of the Church are integrated into these courses where appropriate and relevant, we have yet to find a course where something from the tradition is not appropriate and relevant. Some courses lend themselves more to *ad hoc* efforts than a systematic approach, but we have yet to find a standard course in the law school curriculum where something from the tradition cannot be justifiably inserted. This is true even in the procedure courses, which, by their very nature, would seem to be the most difficult. Our biggest challenge has not been to find ways to incorporate mission material into the courses, but to educate ourselves as faculty members to the full depth and richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition. We are not philosophers or theologians—although some faculty have significant philosophy and theology backgrounds—but mere law professors who have much to learn in these areas. To that end, we have embarked on a series of faculty seminars and workshops to better educate ourselves in the tradition.

Although this approach to the curriculum seems revolutionary to many, it is not. Good law teaching has always involved probing the moral and philosophical underpinnings of the body of law being studied. In our case, the faculty members are asked to pursue this exploration in the context of the Catholic intellectual tradition. We believe that asking our students to reflect critically on the law and its moral underpinnings in each and every course they take provides a richer and more profound classroom experience and better prepares them as future attorneys for success in whatever endeavor they engage. It equips them, the next generation of leadership, to defend truth in a world of moral ambiguity. By combining the rigor of technical analysis with the broader perspective derived from considering the moral and philosophical underpinnings of the law, the student better understands and comprehends the intellectual roots of the Church's moral tradition and how that relates to the justice of the legal system, and thus the student acquires the ability to live better his or her faith-in-action.

To achieve our goal of being a nationally prominent law school characterized by an unqualified commitment to academic and professional excellence, a commitment to justice, and the highest ethical and moral standards, we seek to attract students and faculty of the highest caliber. As regards students, Ave Maria School of Law has been especially blessed. From the beginning, the objective credentials of our entering students have compared favorably with those students entering the top 35 to 45 law schools in the country, as measured by the *US News and World Report* annual survey. Our inaugural class in August of 2000, for example, had an LSAT profile of 155-161 for the 25th-75th percentile points. In the second and third years, the 75th percentile points were 162 and 163, respectively. In other words, the LSAT credentials indicated that one quarter of each of the first three classes scored in the top 15 percent, 13 percent, and 10 percent of LSAT takers, respectively. More important than their objective credentials, of course, are the other qualities that the students brought to the law school—character, integrity, and previous work experience—qualities that suggest a commitment to justice and a desire to help those less fortunate. To date, our students have come from 43 states and more than 125 undergraduate schools, including such outstanding institutions as Duke, Williams, St. Johns (Annapolis), University of Chicago, University of Virginia, and

University of Michigan, as well as from the nation's leading Catholic undergraduate institutions, including the University of Notre Dame, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Thomas Aquinas College, Christendom College, and Boston College. They have chosen Ave Maria over such outstanding law schools as Harvard, Notre Dame, Georgetown, University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and University of Chicago. We, of course, lose far more applicants to these institutions than we enroll, but the mere fact that we are able to attract any students away from such illustrious institutions is a cause for joy and celebration.

Although students are admitted without regard to religious affiliation, approximately 75 percent of the students at Ave Maria identify themselves as Roman Catholic. The remaining students are from various Protestant denominations, mainly from an evangelical background, as well as seven from the Mormon tradition. The student body also includes two Muslim students.

It is, of course, a formidable challenge to attract students of such quality to attend a brand new law school, especially in the first few years when the school is unable to claim ABA accreditation or even suggest that it is likely to obtain it before these students graduate.<sup>12</sup> How do you attract outstanding students in such a circumstance, especially when they have an opportunity to attend some of the finest law schools in the country? To answer this question for ourselves, we surveyed the members of each of our entering classes. The results of the surveys reveal three major reasons why students choose our law school. The first is our mission. They like our distinctive approach to legal education, which integrates Catholic morality and ethics into the teaching and practice of law. Second, they are attracted by the scholarship assistance that we provide. Through Mr. Monaghan's great generosity, we have been able to offer scholarships and grants far exceeding what most law schools can offer. It is fair to say, even today, that we are the most heavily tuition discounted law school in the country.<sup>13</sup>

The third reason given by our students for choosing our law school reveals the kind of leadership qualities they possess. They have a pioneering spirit; they have an entrepreneurial bent. For the first class, they especially liked the challenge of being the founding students, the ones who would set the standards and create the traditions for future generations of students. As we begin our fifth year of operation, these leadership qualities remain the ones that best characterize our students.

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12. Accreditation is especially important for new law schools because it is only with a degree from an accredited law school that a graduate can be certain that he or she can take the bar exam in any of the 50 states and other U.S. territories.

13. Shortly after the formation of the law school was announced, a critic from another school suggested that because of all Mr. Monaghan's money, we would be able to buy our students, implying that there was something improper about this. Of course, every law school seeks to provide as much scholarship assistance as it can to attract worthy students to enroll there rather than at another to which the applicant was admitted. Ironically, the dean of the law school where this critic teaches is one of the most successful deans in legal education because of her ability to increase substantially the law school's endowment so that it can provide greater amounts of financial assistance to prospective students, in part, one presumes, to lure them away from other law schools. Moreover, it has always seemed to me that anything that reduces the debt burden incurred by law students is something to be applauded and greatly desired. It may even be, some might argue, an important component of social justice.



As regards faculty, we have also been blessed from the beginning with an extremely talented group of academic leaders with distinguished careers in academia and the practice of law. In our first year, among those on the faculty were four of the original five founding faculty who suggested the creation of a new Catholic law school to Mr. Monaghan in 1998, including nationally renowned Judge Robert Bork, one of the nation's leading legal scholars and practitioners, and Professor Howard Bromberg, who joined us from the clinical faculty of the University of Michigan Law School. We were also graced that first year with the presence of Professor John Dolan, a visiting professor from Wayne State University Law School and one of the nation's most distinguished commercial law teachers and scholars. All members of the original faculty but one had at least six years of teaching experience (the one exception had 4.5 years), had a distinguished record of scholarly publication, and had been recognized in various ways for teaching proficiency at their previous institutions. Since then, we have continued to add to the faculty a group of young men and women who have great promise of becoming nationally recognized scholars and accomplished teachers. The faculty's commitment to excellence and teaching goes beyond merely equipping students with the necessary technical and professional skills. Our students are also trained to reflect critically on the law and their role within the legal system. The faculty not only views teaching as a vocation but is committed to engaging in significant and cutting-edge scholarship that advances the law to better serve the common good and recognize the dignity of every individual.

We have also been fortunate to have a number of distinguished visiting scholars who have added richness and depth to our academic offerings. Professors Charlie Rice and Gerard Bradley of the Notre Dame Law School faculty have served on our faculty as visiting professors—for one semester in each of our four years of operation in Professor Rice's case and for one semester in our second year of operation in Professor Bradley's case. Visitors for shorter periods have included John Finnis, the distinguished legal philosopher from Oxford University and the University of Notre Dame Law School, Judge Alex Kozinski from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and Dr. Leon Kass, Chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics and Hertog Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Dr. Kass' visit provided an outstanding addition to the Moral Foundations course taught by Judge Bork and me. During Dr. Kass' stay at the law school, he led the first year class through a reading, discussion, and analysis of *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus, an experience that convinced many of us that the Greek Trilogies should be required for all law students in all law schools.

The emphasis on quality is not limited to the faculty, students, and staff. Quality is something to which we aspire in every aspect of our program. We are housed in a building that has been completely refurbished for our use and that is equipped with the finest technology, including Internet access in every seat in every classroom. The law school also sponsors an annual lecture funded by a substantial endowment created by the founding faculty. The inaugural speaker was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, and he has been followed each year by other distinguished members of the national legal community. The speaker for the upcoming year is Justice Antonin Scalia.

The school has also sponsored and hosted a number of academic conferences, including one, co-sponsored with Sacred Heart Major Seminary in the Archdiocese of Detroit, on *St. Thomas Aquinas and the Natural Law Tradition*, which presented the leading natural law scholars in North America. Most recently, the law school co-sponsored a colloquium in Rome entitled *International Law, Democratic Accountability, and Moral Diversity*. The colloquium, which we hope to conduct annually, attracted leading scholars and political figures from the United States and Europe. One major presentation was a debate over the European Constitution by the Honorable Giuliano Amato, the former Prime Minister of Italy and vice president of the Convention on the Future of Europe, and the Honorable William Cash, Conservative member of the British Parliament and one of Britain's leading Eurosceptics.

One measure of a school's success is the outcome it produces. In this regard, I would like to mention several noteworthy accomplishments that mark our brief history and that suggest, to some degree, that we have taken important first steps in achieving our very ambitious goals. Our inaugural graduating class, the class of 2003, achieved a 92 percent pass rate for first-time takers on the bar exam in the 20 states in which they sat for the bar. In the state of Michigan, where the greatest number of our graduates took the bar, our pass rate for first-time takers was 93 percent, the highest of the six Michigan law schools. These bar pass rates far exceed the 68 percent pass rate of all first time test takers nationally. In addition, 98 percent of the members of that first graduating class were employed in legal positions within nine months of graduation. More impressively, 12 of the 65 graduates (almost 20 percent of the class) were hired as judicial law clerks, including eight in federal court clerk positions. Since we began in August 2000, 17 Ave Maria students have been awarded the Alliance Defense Fund's prestigious Blackstone Fellowship, a very competitive national legal internship designed to identify and assist future leaders in the law who are particularly interested in working on issues of religious liberty. A team of three Ave Maria students took first place in the state of Michigan's annual Moot Court competition in the fall of 2003. Another Ave Maria team took first place that same fall in the American Bar Association's Regional Client Counseling Competition, defeating 11 teams from other law schools throughout the Midwest and Canada. Finally, we were granted provisional accreditation by the ABA in the summer of 2002, between our second and third year of operation, the fastest possible time under the ABA's Standards Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools.

In just a few short years, Ave Maria School of Law has established itself as an important center of teaching and scholarship. It has generated widespread interest throughout the legal profession and legal education community for the rigor of its comprehensive core curriculum, the quality of its faculty and students, and its distinctive approach of integrating Catholic morality and ethics into the teachings and practice of law. The challenge to the school in its future years is to keep building on this remarkable foundation and not to lose sight of the reason for its creation. The creation of Ave Maria School of Law has been a tremendously exciting venture for all involved. We are committed to ensuring that it will continue to attract outstanding students and faculty to pursue its distinctive vision of law and legal education.