



EDITORIAL

Special Issue: *Legal Education and the Society of Jesus*

The Study of Jesuit, Catholic Legal Education: An Idea and a Program

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More than seventy years ago, the Vincentian priest and educator Joseph Tinnelly published an article entitled “The Catholic Lawyer - An Idea and a Program.”¹ The article was published in, and its title was a reference to, a new journal for Catholic lawyers that Tinnelly and his colleagues at St. John’s University School of Law had recently established.² The article began by noting the high professional and religious obligations of Catholic lawyers in the United States, and concluded by describing how *The Catholic Lawyer* would aid its readers in achieving the lofty ends towards which their nation and church called them. And, while celebratory in his tone, Tinnelly did not seek praise or accolades from subscribers of *The Catholic Lawyer*; instead, he asked his readers for “prayers that through the intercession of its patron, St. Thomas More,” his and his colleagues’ new initiative might be “guided by the Holy Spirit towards a fruitful and effective accomplishment of its mission.”³ *The Catholic Lawyer* was restyled in 2005 as the *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* and remains in circulation today.

- 1 Joseph T. Tinnelly, C.M., “The Catholic Lawyer - An Idea and a Program,” *The Catholic Lawyer* 1 (1955): 3–7.
- 2 On the history and significance of *The Catholic Lawyer*, see Dennis J. Wieboldt III, “Making Natural Law ‘Useful in the Solution of Practical Problems’: Global Catholicism and Human Rights in *The Catholic Lawyer*, 1955–1964,” *Catholic Historical Review* 111 (2025): 334–58.
- 3 Tinnelly, “The Catholic Lawyer,” 7.

DOI: 10.51238/jeq.6eRVP2J

Received: 14 June 2026 | Accepted: 16 June 2026

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At first glance, it might appear somewhat unusual to begin a special issue of this journal by describing the work of a Vincentian, not a Jesuit. In my view, however, exactly the opposite is true. As Tinnelly rightly noted in 1955, the American Catholic legal community of that era was marked by remarkable “quality and extent of talent” such that the primary “problem” that he and his colleagues confronted was how to most effectively “stimulat[e], marshal[] and coordinat[e] the abundant resources of Catholic scholarship.”⁴ And, as he surely would have known, there was no more consistent source of such talent and scholarship than the Society of Jesus. Indeed, at the time of Tinnelly’s writing, the Society not only operated more law schools than any other Catholic religious order in the United States, but also featured in its ranks the most influential Catholic legal scholars of the twentieth century, including John Courtney Murray.⁵ So influential were the Jesuit legal scholars of this period that one-third of the inaugural Oliver Wendell Holmes Devise Lectures (delivered in 1960) took as their subject three (seemingly) little-known Jesuits who had taught at Boston College and Georgetown.⁶

The Society of Jesus’s leadership in American Catholic legal education has received some focused historical attention, but much more remains to be written about how Jesuits, their students, and their educational institutions have influenced the development of Catholic legal thought in particular and American legal thought in general.⁷ And, the United States aside, so too are there far fewer global studies of the Society’s influence on Catholic legal education than is merited. To be sure, recent portraits of major Jesuit legal scholars have begun to shed new light on the history of Jesuit, Catholic legal thought, but much more remains to be written about the institutions in which these figures were educated, and how they them-

4 Tinnelly, “The Catholic Lawyer,” 7.

5 See “Appendix,” in John M. Breen and Lee J. Strang, “The Road Not Taken: Catholic Legal Education at the Middle of the Twentieth Century,” *American Journal of Legal History* 51 (2011): 637.

6 See Dennis J. Wieboldt III, “The ‘Crusading Fanatics’ of American Law: American Jesuits and the Origins of the Neoscholastic Legal Revival, 1870–1960,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 40, no. 1 (2025): 81–107, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4887908>.

7 See, for example, John M. Breen and Lee J. Strang, “Jesuit Identity in American Legal Education: An Historical Examen,” *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, 2nd ser., 2, no. 2 (2026): 161n7, <https://doi.org/10.51238/jeq.SGaefdW> (collecting book-length historical treatments of individual Jesuit law schools).

selves sought to transmit their insights to future generations of Catholic lawyers and statesmen.⁸

From the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to the Ateneo de Manila in the Philippines, no other Catholic religious order has had as geographically vast an institutional presence as the Society of Jesus.⁹ This is especially true from an educational perspective—for, as then-Superior General Adolfo Nicolás once rightly observed, “The long tradition of the involvement of the Society of Jesus in the intellectual apostolate forms part of [the Society’s] religious identity. . . . This tradition is one of the apostolic preferences of the Society.”¹⁰ By studying how the Society has sought to train graduates of its educational institutions in legal philosophy, canon law, and the law of particular nation-states, scholars will be better equipped to assess the Society’s influence on the historical development of Catholic legal thought, which itself has been an important influence on national legal systems across several continents.¹¹ And while the transmission of Jesuit, Catholic legal thought has not always occurred in the types of three-year professional schools that are now common in the United States, there remains abundant evidence in these pages and elsewhere that further study of this symposium’s theme, “Legal Education and the Society of Jesus,” can be profitable.

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- 8 See, perhaps most recently, Elizabeth Rain Kincaid, *Law from Below: How the Thought of Francisco Suárez, SJ, Can Renew Contemporary Legal Engagement* (Georgetown University Press, 2024).
 - 9 See, generally, John T. McGreevy, *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global* (Princeton University Press, 2016).
 - 10 Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., “On Jesuits Missioned to the Intellectual Apostolate,” May 24, 2014, available at, <https://pje.blog.fordham.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/LetteronIntellectualApostolate.pdf>.
 - 11 See, for example, Samuel L. Bray, “When Catholicism Was Part of the Common Law: The Influence of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition on the Common Law,” in *Faith in Law, Law in Faith: Reflecting on the Work of John Witte, Jr.*, ed. Rafael Domingo, Gary S. Hauk, and Timothy P. Jackson (Brill, 2024), 235–50.