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# IN MEMORY OF ROBERT F. DRINAN, S.J.

CHRISTOPHER J. BORGENT†

This issue of the *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* is dedicated to the memory of Father Robert F. Drinan, S.J. When the editors, the other authors, and I first began working on the written symposium contained in this issue, we viewed it as a way to examine the latest book by a leading scholar; now, this issue represents our joining in the chorus of voices celebrating the life of a man who was much more than simply a scholar.

In his eighty-six years Father Robert Drinan was a priest, a Congressperson, a human rights activist, a dean, a law professor, and, yes, a prolific and influential scholar. But to each of us, he was much more than the sum of his résumé.

Father Drinan will of course be remembered for having been the first priest to be elected to Congress as a voting member (Michigan, then a territory, had appointed a priest as a non-voting delegate in the 1830s). Arriving in Congress in opposition to the Vietnam War, he served from 1971 until 1981, when Pope John Paul II issued a worldwide ban on priests serving in political office. Father Drinan, “with regret and pain,” did not seek a sixth term in office.<sup>1</sup>

When asked if he had hesitated following the order, he would smile and say something to the extent of, “Not at all. I had made my priestly vows years before I had ever become a member of Congress.” Looking back on his time in office, Father Drinan said in a recent interview with his characteristic wryness: “It was a good 10 years . . . . We got rid of a president and ended a war, little things like that.”<sup>2</sup>

For a man who always served his God, even while being in the maelstrom of politics, it is fitting that his recent book *Can*

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Weil, *Obituary: Rev. Robert Drinan; Congressman, GU Law School Teacher*, THE WASH. POST Jan 29, 2007, at B06.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Mauro, *Our Father*, Legal Times.com (Nov. 27 2006) at <http://www.law.com/jsp/dc/PubArticleDC.jsp?id=1164029725792&hub=TopStories> (last visited Jan. 30, 2007).

*God and Caesar Coexist?* wrestled with the conundrum of religious freedom within the various societies that exist in the world today. At a time when it is so fashionable to talk of a “clash of civilizations,” Father Drinan sought out ways in which people with different religions—or no religion—could find commonality and mutual respect through law. It is a beautiful and optimistic vision.

It is also one that he lived. And, in the quarter century since he left Congress, Father Drinan had, if anything, increased the breadth and depth of his activities in pursuit of social justice. He will be remembered as a central figure in the development of the law of human rights. He addressed issues of nuclear proliferation, advocated for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and fought the twin scourges of racism and poverty within our own country. He was a founder of the Lawyers’ Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control and he served on the boards of Human Rights First (formerly the Lawyers’ Committee for Human Rights), the International League for Human Rights, Bread for the World, the Council for a Livable World Educational Fund, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, among other organizations.

Including *Can God and Caesar Coexist?*, Father Drinan wrote a dozen books on topics as diverse as U.S. policy towards Israel, religion and the U.S. court system, Christian ethics, and the study of human rights. He was also the founder of the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* and the author of dozens of articles in a wide array of journals.

But, as I mentioned at the beginning, Father Drinan was much more than his résumé. He meant different things to different people but to my family he was always a symbol of what it meant to be a socially-engaged Catholic. It has been a singular honor to be involved in this issue of the *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* and to get to know Father Drinan as a person, rather than as a symbol.

In the very short time I knew him, Father Drinan never donned the austere mantle of revered senior scholar or of a serious moral leader; rather, he was always gracious, warm, and easy-going. While some people want to hear themselves speak, he was more curious about what those around him thought. While so many people are quick to anger, Father Drinan was

quick to share his joy. For example, he was especially excited that *Can God and Caesar Coexist?* was being translated into Turkish and would have a readership in the Muslim world.

Jesus said that we need to see the world through the eyes of a child. For all of his hard work opposing the war in Vietnam, promoting racial understanding and equity, protecting human rights, speaking for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and challenging accepted nuclear strategy, Father Drinan kept a child-like enthusiasm to his final days. In the process of working on this issue I found that, although we will always remember the public personality, Father Robert Drinan was even more impressive as a person.

May he rest in peace and may we take up his life's struggle.

