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William E. Leahy—An Appreciation

ON NOVEMBER 12, 1966, the new home of The Columbus School of Law on the campus of The Catholic University of America was formally opened and dedicated as Leahy Hall. A distinguished body of legal educators, judges, barristers, students, and friends assembled to witness the blessing of the building by the Rector, the Most Reverend William J. McDonald, and to hear a short program of addresses introduced by the Dean of the School, Dr. Vernon X. Miller. Among those seated on the dais was Mrs. William E. Leahy, widow of the man for whom the building was named.

Over ten years have passed since the death of William E. Leahy, on June 5, 1956. With a new generation looking to the future perhaps more than to the past, it is probable that many of the participants in that ceremony were not fully aware of the significance in the naming of the building. In many ways, William E. Leahy typified the best in the tradition of American citizenship and left behind him a legacy of high ideals and public-spirited service, both in the practice of the law and in the community at large, that will serve as high inspiration to the faculty and student body of the School.

A man of medium height, solid rotund build, somewhat ruddy in complexion, and with a ready Celtic twinkle in his eye, "Bill" Leahy, as his friends and associates knew him, was a rare combination of penetrating wit and wisdom. A man among men, he was quick in repartee and good humor. As a public speaker with a background of classical education, he was an ornament to any occasion. In the criminal court, his courage and vigor were both respected and feared. Among his friends and in innumerable civic and religious causes, he could always be counted on for unquestioning generosity.

Perhaps the key to his personality was a deep appreciation of his humble but solid lineage and of the great opportunities that America opened up to him. Of third generation Irish descent, his grandparents having emigrated from County Kerry, Ireland, he was born in Monson, Massachusetts, on July 11, 1886, the son of David Daniel and Bridget (Powers) Leahy. Upon

graduation from Monson Academy in 1903, he was offered a scholarship by Yale University. He decided, however, to matriculate at Holy Cross College, Worcester, Massachusetts, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1907. From 1907 to 1909, he taught Latin, Greek, and German at the Williamstown, Massachusetts, High School, and became its vice principal.

At this time, he began to think of wider horizons. With the encouragement of a priest advisor, he determined to go on for the study of law. Upon further consideration, he chose Georgetown University Law School as his alma mater, and, like many another student who has come to Washington, D. C. for higher studies, he remained to make his career in the capital. Graduating from Georgetown with his LL.B. in 1912, he was admitted to the District of Columbia Bar. The following year, he proceeded to win the LL.M. degree. In 1913 also, he married Miriam Kramer, the daughter of a Washington physician, and began his professional career as an Assistant United States Attorney.

Of modest personal means during all this time, Leahy worked his way through law school, teaching languages and public speaking and tutoring. He taught for a time at Gonzaga High School, and from 1916 to 1922 served as Instructor in the Georgetown University Law School. At heart, an educator as well as practicing lawyer, he never lost his scholarly and cultural interests. In recognition of this as well as of his professional achievements, Georgetown University honored him with the LL.D. degree in 1943. Holy Cross College, which awarded him the Master of Arts degree in 1922, conferred the Doctorate of Laws in 1947.

During World War I, he worked on the Selective Service Act, continuing as an Assistant United States Attorney until 1919. In 1921, he was appointed by the Judges of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, to prosecute Jules "Nicky" Arnstein. From 1925 to 1947 he served as special Assistant Attorney General of the United States. He subsequently became a principal legal counsel in a series of celebrated and colorful cases involving diverse interests and individuals, including Albert B. Fall in the Teapot Dome oil scandal, Eleanor Patterson in the Will Case, the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Socrates Onassis, John S. Farnsworth, Senator Patrick McCarran, Al Capone, the American Medical Association, the United Mine Workers, and the Republic of China.

At the beginning of World War II, 1940-41, he was made Chairman of the Board of Appeals of the District of Columbia Selective Service System. In July 1941, he was sworn in as Director of the Selective Service Act for the District of Columbia, a post to which he was reappointed by President Truman in 1948. A tireless public servant, he was named for the President's Commission on Internal Security and Individual Rights in 1951, meanwhile serving as civilian aide for the District of Columbia to the Secretary of the

Army, from 1947 to 1956. In 1952, President Truman appointed him to the Personnel Security Review Board of the Atomic Energy Commission. In the same year, he was made a member of the D. C. Commissioners' Citizens Advisory Council, becoming its Chairman in 1953.

Leahy's interests and services were by no means confined to the field of law. There was hardly an area of civic, charitable, and social responsibility in the National Capital and beyond to which he did not contribute liberally of his energy and resources. From 1948 to 1950, he was President of the Tuberculosis Association of the District of Columbia, becoming a Director of the National Association in 1952. His other interests ranged from Chairman of the Annual Drive for the Washington Home for Foundlings to the numerous fraternal and benevolent programs of the Knights of Columbus, in which he was an outstanding leader. Among his affiliations, may be mentioned the American and the District of Columbia Bar Associations, the Sigma Nu Phi Fraternity, the Lawyers, Cosmos, Rotary, Metropolitan, and Alfalfa Clubs, the Charles Carroll Forum, and the John Carroll Society of the Archdiocese of Washington.

Leahy was not, however, merely a "joiner." His membership in these organizations represented a positive and constructive interest and an evidence of appreciation for the opportunity to work and to serve. Recognition of this fact was memorialized in numerous awards given him, ranging from the President's Medal of Merit to a Citation of the D. C. American Legion, honorary degrees, and public commendations during his lifetime. As an editorial in the *Washington Post* of July 4, 1953 observed, he was "one of Washington's outstanding citizens serving the public interest in a variety of generous ways."

Leahy's association with the Columbus University School of Law of Washington, D. C., began in 1926, when he joined its faculty as an instructor, becoming dean in the same year. He served in both capacities until 1932, when he was made President of Columbus University, a post which he held until the merger of that institution into The Catholic University of America in 1954. Columbus University had been chartered under the laws of the District of Columbia and was financed originally with an appropriation of the special service funds of the Knights of Columbus remaining from World War I. The University developed into two schools, Law and Accountancy, both of which functioned satisfactorily and produced a large and successful body of instruction in its adjoining buildings at 1323-1325 Eighteenth Street, N.W.

As time went on, however, Columbus University faced a number of serious problems relative to future planning and finance. Meanwhile, the School of Law of The Catholic University of America was undergoing administrative changes and was faced with a critical shortage of space for any

kind of expansion. With characteristic foresight, Leahy approached the administration of Catholic University and in the name of the Trustees of Columbus University proposed a merger by which all the assets and liabilities of the latter would be transferred to Catholic University. After consultation with officials of the Association of American Law Schools, the merger was effected by a special Act of Congress. The only condition proposed to and accepted by The Catholic University of America was that henceforth its law school would carry the name of the Columbus School of Law. The Catholic University of America thus came into possession, not only of the buildings of Columbus University in the center of the city, and a fine law library, but also a proud and symbolic name with a solid tradition of academic service and achievement.

Catholic University immediately transferred its law faculty and student body to the downtown location, improved the premises, and proceeded with both day and night classes. While there were some voices of doubt, the merged school moved ahead rapidly, in enrollment, faculty development, and general acceptance. As a result, The Catholic University of America was faced by 1964 with the alternative of making substantial expenditures to bring the Eighteenth Street property into conformity with the revised building code of the District of Columbia or of constructing a new building for the Columbus School of Law. It was decided to bring the School back to the main Campus with a new building. The old properties were therefore sold to raise funds for the project. The new building was completed and opened for the beginning of the 1966-67 academic year.

When William E. Leahy died, he left all his possessions, by the simplest form of will, to his wife. There were no children. While he was not regarded as a rich man, his years of successful practice had resulted in a substantial accumulation, which was further improved by prudent investment. As the new building of the Columbus School of Law began to take shape, Mrs. Leahy made some enquiries as to the balance required for its financing after receipt from the sale of the old property. As a result, she offered to designate a bequest of \$400,000.00, with the request that the building be named Leahy Hall as a memorial in honor of her husband. This generous offer was accepted by the Trustees of the University.

In retrospect, the building could hardly be more appropriately named. Leahy achievement and a Leahy bequest are behind its physical structure of brick and stone, glass and steel. But even more, the Leahy legacy is one of grateful remembrance and the perennial inspiration of a great man, "A dedicated co-worker with God in the dispensation of justice."

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