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8 Geo. J. Legal Ethics 745

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A Tribute to Robert F. Drinan, S.J.: Honoring a Lifetime of Public Service*

SHERMAN L. COHN**

I had just been elected to the Congress for the first time [in 1971]. I told my audience that God had sent me to Washington to do what St. Patrick had done for Ireland — drive the snakes out of this city.

I accomplished my mission in my ten years in the Congress. But then the snakes came back!

This quote is vintage Bob Drinan: clear, directed, and humorous. This is the Bob Drinan that so many of us have had the great privilege to know and esteem, and from whom we have benefitted so much.

The bare facts give us a skeleton: born in Boston in 1920, Bob Drinan received his B.A. and then an LL.M. from Boston College in 1942 and 1947 and his law degree and an LL.M. from Georgetown in 1949 and 1950 respectively. He became a Jesuit novitiate in 1942, was ordained in 1953, and received a Ph.D. in 1954 from Gregorian University in Rome. A professor and dean at Boston College School of Law from 1956-70, he went on to serve as a member of Congress from 1971 to 1981. After leaving public office, Bob Drinan returned to Georgetown University where he has been a professor of law since 1981.

But the skeleton needs to be filled out with the man himself: the man who has dedicated himself to his God and to the people of the world. A man of boundless energy, who when other men consider retiring undertakes still another new project of service. Bob Drinan took Boston College from a small, quiet local law school largely for the Catholic population of the local community and built it into a school of national renown that draws from the entire country students of all races, creeds, and national origins. In Congress, he became the leading spokesperson for the poor and the forgotten, the discriminated against, and the starving — not only of the United States but of the world. That he was the first Catholic priest to serve in the Halls of Congress, and wore his clerical collar with pride, only added to his effectiveness.

* On Saturday, March 18, 1995, Georgetown University held a benefit honoring Father Robert Drinan's continuing public service. Donations will be used to benefit the Legal Ethics Program at Georgetown University Law Center. Contributors are recognized following this tribute.

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When the Holy See decreed that priests should not hold public office, Father Drinan had no doubt but to obey, for his hallmark has been service to his God and to his Church. But Bob Drinan did not put himself out to pasture. Rather, he joined the faculty of the Georgetown University Law Center, where he was close enough to the Capitol to keep his eyes on his former colleagues. Neither his voice nor his pen were stilled. Whenever he saw injustice, Bob Drinan spoke up, loud and clear. His message of how humanity should treat humanity was heard on the op-ed pages of the major daily newspapers, at congressional hearings, and in speeches throughout the land — indeed, even in many foreign lands. It is vintage Bob Drinan that, at an age when most people would enjoy a summer of leisure, he is off, at age 75, to teach for the summer in South Africa, to help that land of much pain advance toward the promise of tomorrow.

At Georgetown, Bob Drinan picked up two themes that are central to his life: human rights and ethics. He created the courses in human rights at the Law Center and aided others in coming to the field. And he inspired the newest of the Georgetown clinics through which Georgetown students will gain experience in fighting the never-ending battle for this cause.

In ethics, Bob Drinan built upon his firm Jesuit roots. Georgetown Law, it must be recalled, taught Legal Ethics to its students in the era when it was looked down upon by the schools of great prestige. In the post-Watergate era, those schools were introduced to the teaching of Legal Ethics by the force of accreditation standards. Georgetown's long-term dedication to ethics was a fertile ground for Father Drinan. Bob Drinan threw himself into that field: teaching, writing, lecturing and encouraging others to do the same. He has been an inspiration for all of us in the field. Through his energy and vision, the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* was created and has prospered. When it was created, it was the only journal dedicated to legal ethics. Today, it is clearly the premier voice in the nation. Bob Drinan has worked hard to ensure that, from its first issue, it would be recognized as a journal of quality to which every academic, every jurist, and every lawyer laboring in the field would look. This journal will long stand as a living and contributing monument to a great man.

In his teaching, Bob Drinan has reached and inspired thousands of students. Those who had the privilege of studying with Bob Drinan have been touched and changed by the experience, for he is a master at challenging and inspiring. And so it has been for those of us who have been privileged to serve on the faculty with Bob: in his dedicated and gentle way, he has lifted each of us to greater vision.

With all of that said, how does one summarize the man? What is that connecting cord? It is dedication to public service, as well as dedication to his students and education. But it is more. You cannot separate Bob Drinan, the teacher, and Bob Drinan, the public servant, from Father Bob

Drinan, the Jesuit. It is his acceptance of the teaching of his Order that service to humanity in the name of God is the highest calling of all, and it is his living of that teaching that truly attests to the greatness of this human being. And, at seventy-five, he is just beginning. Wherever there are snakes to be swept away, we will find Bob Drinan broom in hand.

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