



Most Devout Law Schools

Religion has long played a significant role in many of the nation's law schools. Some schools have scaled back their religious ties, while others continue to embrace them.

BY MIKE STETZ

When it comes to religious devotion, law schools are like people. Some people aren't religious at all. Others claim to be, but only go to church on Christmas and Easter, no doubt slyly looking at their phones during the sermon.

And still others are truly devout. They incorporate religion into their daily lives. Not only do they go to church but they also take part in church activities and causes. And miraculously, many even turn off their phones.

Almost 25 percent of the nation's law schools have religious ties. And, like people, some are more devout than others. They make efforts to incorporate religion

into the law school experience in varying degrees. They may have centers and institutions devoted to religious study. Some of their faculty may be of faith. As preLaw magazine has done in the past, we set out to identify such schools.

Some law students feel their work should be rooted in their religious beliefs so they can feel fulfilled, energized. Some simply prefer an institution where their views will be supported.

At such schools, there is opportunity for both.

Law schools and religion have a natural connection, given how their philosophies intersect. Thou shall not steal? Thou shall not kill? These are both commandments

and legal statutes. Breaking them can land you in a very, very hot place and/or in the slammer.

The Bible?

Leviticus 19:15 says: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly."

1 John 3:4 says: "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."

Why, it's like a law textbook . . .

"Many lawyers and law students who are active members of mainstream faith communities do not easily see a connection between their religious profession as 'believers' and their secular profession as lawyers,"

wrote Fred Enman, a Jesuit priest and lawyer, in a paper called “Law as Ministry.” “Yet there is a strong and comprehensive tradition about justice in Judeo-Christian scripture that can permit any lawyer to see himself or herself as a person engaged in ‘ministry’ in a very real sense.”

A number of law schools focus on this connection. Take Ave Maria School of Law, once again our choice for Most Devout Catholic Law School. The Naples, Fla., school was founded to be an institution where religiously minded students could find commonality.

Its mission, in part, reads: “Ave Maria School of Law offers an outstanding legal education in fidelity to the Catholic Faith as expressed through Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church.”

At Ave Maria, Mass is celebrated every day. There are crucifixes in classrooms. A chaplain, Monsignor Frank McGrath, lives on campus.

The school was established in 1999 by Domino’s Pizza’s founder Tom Monaghan, who felt many Catholic schools had abandoned their missions.

“There’s nothing wrong with most Catholic schools, except they’re not Catholic,” Monaghan told *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

A number of law schools that were founded by or had ties to religious denominations have evolved over the years to become more secular in nature. In some cases, they have cut ties to their churches.

It’s partly in reaction to the fact that society has become more secular. One recent poll found that 22 percent of Americans don’t have a religious affiliation, up from 6 percent in 1992. And many law schools have followed societal trends to embrace controversial causes, such as same-sex marriage and transgender rights, which many religions find to be in conflict with their teachings.

Many Catholic universities and their law schools have come under fire by critics such as Monaghan. University of Notre Dame caught heat a few years ago for giving a religious medal to former Vice President Joe Biden. Biden supports a number of anti-Catholic principles, such as abortion rights.

Georgetown University started an LGBTQ Resource Center in 2008, which was a first for a Catholic institution.

“We have sought to build on the rich interfaith and intellectual engagements of Georgetown to create a center that will speak to all of us in all of our rich diversity,”

the school notes.

But some alumni find such a center and other actions to be inconsistent with the values of Georgetown, the nation’s oldest Catholic university.

Georgetown University Law Center contends that it remains very much wedded to its Jesuit roots. Pope Francis is the first Jesuit to lead the Church, and Georgetown has been actively supporting a number of his initiatives, including the protection of migrants.

Criticism hasn’t been limited to Catholic universities and law schools. Baylor University in Waco, Texas, was questioned when it removed “homosexual acts” from its list of prohibited conduct in 2015. Some charged that the Baptist school was endorsing such behavior, which the school denied.

“These changes were made because we didn’t believe the language reflected Baylor’s caring community,” a spokesperson told *The Dallas Morning News* at the time.

The rise of secularism is one of the reasons that evangelical law schools were founded. Lynchburg, Va.-based Liberty University School of Law is preLaw’s top-ranked Christian law school. On its

website, it notes that it is “Distinctively Christian.”

“At Liberty Law, our uniquely tailored legal program taught with sound biblical principles will equip you in your pursuit of justice in your community and in the world,” the site states.

Liberty University was founded by the late Jerry Falwell Sr., a well-known Southern Baptist pastor who helped start the Moral Majority, which promoted conservative causes and supported conservative politicians.

Devout schools have become popular because they offer a different experience than secular institutions, noted Naomi Schaefer Riley, author of the book, “God on the Quad: How Religious Colleges and the Missionary Generation Are Changing America.”

In it, she notes that students with religious identities who attend secular schools “quickly find themselves a beleaguered minority,” both in the classroom and in their extracurricular lives. They routinely suffer prejudices and have to tolerate behaviors they find offensive.

At the following schools, however, that’s not likely.

Most Devout Catholic Law Schools



No.1 Ave Maria School of Law, Naples, Fla. Though a Catholic school, Ave Maria welcomes students from all faiths. However, nearly 60 percent of the students practice the Catholic religion. That’s the greatest

percentage among all Catholic law schools. For 18 consecutive years, the school has participated in the March for Life in Washington, D.C.

No.2 University of St. Thomas School of Law - Minneapolis
 One of the hallmarks of University of St. Thomas - Minneapolis is its Terrence J. Murphy Institute for Catholic Thought, Law and Public Policy, which is a collaboration between the law school and the university's Center for Catholic Studies. The school's motto is "All for the Common Good," which according to the institution, is "a concept that rejects individualism and focuses on the interdependence of humanity and our planet." Half of the school's faculty is Catholic.

No.3 Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law, Washington, D.C.
 The law school dates back to 1897, just after the founding of Catholic University, which was approved by Pope Leo XIII, who began leading the church in 1878. So, yes, it's got quite the faith-based history. And that continues today. The law school is home to the Center for Religious Liberty. The law school and the university's School of Canon offer a rare dual-degree program in which students can earn a J.D. and a Licentiate in Canon Law.

No.4 St. John's University School of Law, Queens, N.Y.
 St. John's started its Center for Law and Religion in 2010 because of the way the two societal forces have been linked through history. As professor Mark Movsesian, director of the center, notes: "Law traditionally has looked to religion for fundamental concepts like justice and equality, and religion often has made law central to believers' daily lives." The law school follows the Vincentian mission of St. John's University, which was founded 55 years before the law school. The Vincentian mission is inspired by St. Vincent de Paul's compassion and zeal for service.

No.5 Gonzaga University School of Law, Spokane, Wash.
 Gonzaga is a Jesuit-affiliated law school that was established in 1912. The law school and university are named after St. Aloysius de Gonzaga, an Italian aristocrat who gave up his fortune and joined the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. He died in 1591 after caring for those inflicted with a plague. Just 23 years old at his death, he became the patron saint of young students. "As a Jesuit

institution, we are committed to educating the whole person to serve the public good, to engaging in a dialogue with all cultures and religious or ethical traditions, and to pursuing justice," the school's mission statement says.

No.6 Seton Hall University School of Law, Newark, N.J.
 Seton Hall's chaplain, Father Nicholas Gengaro, has welcomed nearly 20 entering law classes. He once wrote a blog post noting how important it is to reassure people of all faiths that they are welcome at the school. He pointed out how interreligious respect and dialogue has grown over the years. "The point of these examples is to show that what we do at Seton Hall Law



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School is not the exception but the rule in the Catholic Church,” he wrote. “We welcome to these halls of study individuals of all faiths and all people of goodwill to learn and grow and thrive in an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity.”

No.7 Loyola University New Orleans College of Law,
New Orleans, La.

Loyola University New Orleans is another Jesuit law school, established in 1914. The classes of 2002 and 2003 gifted the school with reminders of Jesuit ideals, which were installed along the walkway to the library. Among them are: pursuit of excellence; learning from experience; development of personal potential; appreciation of things both great and small; commitment to service; and special concern for the poor and oppressed. Now, all who walk to the library can be inspired by these ideals.

No.8 Creighton University School of Law,
Omaha, Neb.

Catholic tradition is a significant part of Creighton. For instance, every fall, like a number of other Jesuit and Catholic law schools, Creighton holds a Red Mass. The ceremony dates back to the 13th century, when it marked the fall term of the King’s Bench during the reign of Edward of England. Priests wore red vestments, hence its name. According to Creighton, the Mass “provides an opportunity for attending members of the legal community – judges, attorneys, law school professors, law enforcement and governmental agencies – to reflect on the God-given power attached to their office.”

No.9 Santa Clara University School of Law,
Santa Clara, Calif.

Santa Clara is in the heart of Silicon Valley, but the Jesuit law school was founded in 1911, well before Google and Apple came to be. The main university was established even earlier, in 1851, at Mission Santa Clara de Asis, one of the 21 California missions. As the university notes: “The Mission points not only to the past but also to the present and the future. Not only a reminder of our history and heritage, it is an active and functioning university chapel as well. It symbolizes Santa Clara University’s desire to enhance and deepen – not simply preserve – its religious character.”

No.10 St. Mary’s University School of Law,
San Antonio, Texas
St. Mary’s, the only Catholic law school



in Texas, belongs to the Marianist – the Society of Mary – congregation. It offers a campus ministry, which it refers to as the “heart of the School of Law.” The law chaplain, Sister Grace Walle, offers personal guidance, spiritual support, opportunity for community prayer and social occasions. The ministry also organizes spring-break service trips to Austin, Dallas and New Orleans.

No.11 Marquette University Law School,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Going to a Jesuit school offers advantages even if one is not of the Catholic faith, notes Marquette Dean Joseph Kearney in his “Message From the Dean” address. He notes that unlike many institutions, Marquette is not constrained by “political correctness.” “In fact, The Society of Jesus, Marquette University and this law school are absolutely committed to the core concept of academic freedom and to a full dialogue on every and any issue. We are not afraid or ashamed to speak about faith, morality, and right and wrong, but we are not parochial in our views.”

No.12 University of Dayton School of Law,
Dayton, Ohio

University of Dayton is a Marianist institution with a rich tradition of inclusion. Indeed, when the school opened in 1922, the first class had two women and an African-American. The law school also has a campus minister, Kathy Sales, who offers personal support and pastoral care for life and spiritual issues and crises. Students can submit prayer requests anonymously to be included in the chapel book of intentions.

Most Devout Christian Schools

No.1 Liberty University School of Law,
Lynchburg, Va.

Among the dual degrees this school offers is a J.D./Master of Arts in Religion. “Be both a law and divinity student,” the school suggests. “You will learn to defend both your clients and your faith as you study Scripture, apologetics and discipleship.”

No.2 Regent University School of Law,
Virginia Beach, Va.

Founded by Pat Robertson, the well-known promoter of conservative causes, the school follows his principles. The law school’s philosophy: “Our commitment to faith-law integration is woven into our curriculum, as our faculty, dedicated to Christ’s call both personally and professionally, provide a caring and nurturing environment in which students gain an understanding of the foundations of law and learn to develop the ethical and moral code required for the recognition and resolution of ethical dilemmas.”

No.3 Trinity Law School,
Santa Ana, Calif.

Trinity Law is another school that focuses on Christian-inspired learning. The school’s Carl F.H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding is “dedicated to the advancement of Christian wisdom in all areas of life and thought for the glory of God, the good of His church, and the welfare of the world.”

No.4 Brigham Young University - J. Reuben
Clark Law School, Provo, Utah

BYU Law is both devout and highly regarded. Affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it routinely ranks high for academics and affordability. The university is home to the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, which has helped organize more than 350 international events in more than 50 countries.

No.5 Pepperdine University School of Law, Malibu, Calif.

At Pepperdine, social events and official ceremonies begin with prayer. That's a significant part of the school's culture. "It is not unusual that business meetings will likewise be convened with a request to God for prudence, understanding and guidance," the school's website notes. "Many of Pepperdine's professors and administrators take the time to spiritually encourage and pray with students and others who need the care that those who profess faith are called to give." Pepperdine is affiliated with Churches of Christ, but students of all faiths are welcome.

No.6 Baylor University School of Law, Waco, Texas

Baylor Law is part of Baylor University, which has the distinction of being the largest Baptist University in the world. And the two institutions are very much aligned. "As a member of the Baylor University community, Baylor Law shares in the University's mission to educate men and women by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community," the mission statement says. The law school is particularly proud of its pro bono efforts. It has won seven major awards for pro bono work in the past decade.

No.7 Faulkner University, Thomas Goode Jones School of Law, Montgomery, Ala.

Charles Campbell, Faulkner's interim law dean, uses a Scripture verse in his "Message From the Dean" to describe the school's mission: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17). The school is affiliated with Churches of Christ. Public service is stressed.

No.8 Belmont University College of Law, Nashville, Tenn.

Belmont Law is part of Belmont University, the largest ecumenical Christian university in America. The uni-

versity's faculty members all hold religious values, according to the school: "Belmont faculty confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are active members of churches that support that historic confession of faith. They come from the full range of denominations, so Belmont students benefit from the strengths of these varied traditions enriching Belmont's Christian community of learning and service."

No.9 Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law, Raleigh, N.C.

As part of a Baptist university, the law school incorporates religion into its teachings. Yet it stresses that students are not obligated to embrace a particular kind of thinking. Instead, it wants students to have open minds. "We encourage students to examine the relationship between spiritual and legal issues, to explore the theological

foundations for law, to think differently about justice and the legal system, and to consider how we can help achieve a more just and merciful society," the school says. It offers a dual J.D. and Master of Divinity degree.

No.10 Concordia University School of Law, Boise, Idaho

Concordia Law's vision is to prepare leaders for the transformation of society. And it does so by "welcoming diverse perspectives in an environment of open discourse and academic freedom in the tradition of Martin Luther, the founder of the Christian Reformation," it says. It's one of the nation's newest law schools, having been established in 2012. It's part of Portland, Ore.-based Concordia University, one of 10 universities established by The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod.

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