

Cornerstones of a Catholic Law School: *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and *Fides et Ratio*

As one of the founders of Ave Maria School of Law, I have had the great privilege of participating in the strategic implementation of the first Catholic law school in the new millennium. No writings were more influential to the Law School's founding than four documents authored by Pope John Paul II during the 10 years that preceded the dawn of the new millennium.

Released on August 15, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, 1990, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (From the Heart of the Church) provides profound principles that serve as 'purpose filled' guides, eternal reminders, sure paths, and dynamic tools for comprehensive inquiry. In a sense, *Ex Corde* serves as a blueprint for the continuous and ubiquitous intellectual renewal that results from the rigorous search for truth. Because truth is an essential precursor to the work of justice, *Ex Corde*'s principles offer Catholic law school's much for reflection and integration.

Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth), released on August 6, Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, 1993, radiates the 'meaning fullness' of truth and Truth -- as discerned through observation and inspiration. Law school education seeks to infuse students with the ability to think comprehensively, observe concretely, articulate succinctly, and judge wisely through rigorous reasoning. *Veritatis Splendor* has much to contribute to this formative process and distinctive pedagogy.

Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life), released on March 25, the Annunciation of the Lord, 1995, elucidates human dignity and respect for life as central to the just society. Well-reasoned, coherent, and consistent law supports human life from the moment of conception to natural death as an inalienable right upon which just societies flourish. When rooted in eternal principles, law provides a sure foundation for freedom and the common good. In the absence of the Gospel of Life, law loses its meaning, resonance, and integrity.

Released on September 14, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, 1998, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason) provides extraordinary instruction on the "Relationship between Faith and Reason." Both are essential to the search for truth and the work of justice.

This paper proposes to explore how these four documents can serve as remarkable cornerstones for Catholic law school education in the new millennium. Indeed, these documents offer timeless wisdom that enhances course instruction and extracurricular learning opportunities such as community projects and distinguished speakers series.

The combined classroom and beyond the classroom opportunities can energize the law school community in a manner that is ideal to the fostering of the qualities that Cardinal Newman described in *Idea of a University* as necessary for the development of an "integrative habit of learning." And an integrative habit of learning is essential to the proficient, constructive, and wise practice of law.

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