

## Opening Remarks

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## SYMPOSIUM LAW, RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

### OPENING REMARKS

JOSEPH W. BELLACOSA<sup>†</sup>

Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this to attention because His Eminence and I said that we always began class and other important events on time. My name is Joseph Bellacosa. I'm the Dean of the Law School. I'm privileged as Dean to welcome everyone to this symposium at our law school.

I wish to acknowledge the presence of the former governor, Governor Hugh Carey of Brooklyn, and I also want to acknowledge generally the university officials, faculty from the law school and from other parts of the university and the distinguished participants and guests who are here for this symposium.

For St. John's University School of Law no function could be more fitting than to host a program on Law, Religion and The Public Good. This is a theme and a topic that is just right for our Catholic and our Vincentian perspective university and tradition. It needs to be forthrightly asserted and explored and proclaimed and widely disseminated. We are aware from the writings of Professor Stephen Carter's books that the eviction of

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religion from the public square is a matter of great concern because it really diminishes the public good if we think about the equation. This country is very great and very rich and very powerful and it enjoys blessings of freedom unparalleled in history for those who read history and should learn from history in a learning environment like a university. Yet we are far from perfection or harmony in this country when it comes to some of the transcendent virtues of morality and the values of true freedom and when I use the term true freedom, I am incorporating in that correlative responsibility to community, to other human beings, to the human good. The synergy that enriches freedom is important because it protects it from evolving into narcissistic license or purely individuality.

St. John's as a great university and law school has an obligation to try to illuminate the truth as we see it, as we search for it, and as we know it. With that in mind, as part of the 75th Anniversary of our law school, which has been celebrated wonderfully and diversely throughout this year, this serious symposium has been planned and convened by Professor Rosemary Salomone, among others. The presentations of all of the participants should be stimulating and valuable and we thank each one for sharing views, time, talents and the special experiences and perspectives that they will offer. The additional delight for me this morning is to open the program by presenting to you someone who surely, in the cliché, needs no introduction. He was my high school preparatory seminary teacher at Cathedral in Brooklyn in the early '50s. Then he was my pupil in this very building in law school as a law student in the '70s. God has blessed me and my wife, Mary of 40 years, with his friendship during all that time. Dare I say the friendship is good and the number of years soon to be 50. I harken back to that first time to that first relationship of meeting Father Anthony Bevilacqua because it focuses on him as a preeminent teacher. His life has been teaching, of course in conjunction with his priestly ministries, Episcopal leadership and recognition far and wide of the god-given gifts and talents that he has shared so abundantly for the good of the Lord's people and for the common good. The Holy Father has over the years entrusted him with most delicate and difficult problems as well as the responsibility to shepherd now the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and as well as other important assignments of responsibilities as a bishop.

Cardinal Bevilacqua has been the leader in the *ex corde* deliberations that so affect higher education. His *alma mater*, St. John's, has recognized and honored him in every way possible including most recently with the President's Medal and the St. Thomas Moore Award for Outstanding Moral Leadership.

There is so much more to commend him and his thoughts to us but his own modesty and the allowance of time for his thoughts, his insights, not my words, suggest that the time has come to give him the microphone and the floor. As a mark of respect and affection for the fact that he continues to come back to us regularly to share himself and his time, which is so limited and which bears the burden of so many other responsibilities; yet selflessly, he finds the time to be with us to mark his witness and his presence to what we do and what we are trying to do. I now proudly ask Cardinal Bevilacqua to share his keynote prospectus for our program and I thank him for being with us back home at *alma mater* once again. Your Eminence.

