

# Celebrating



# Years of Impact

# CONTENTS



Leading the Way for Religious Freedom	<b>2</b>
Timeline: Milestones in the Work of Religious Freedom	<b>6</b>
Human Dignity as a Center Initiative	<b>12</b>
<i>Dignitas Infinita: A Christian Proposal for a Pluralist Society</i>	<b>14</b>
Looking Back, Looking Forward: BYU Law School Deans Reflect on 25 Years of ICLRS	<b>28</b>
By the Numbers	<b>34</b>
Law Reform Across the Globe	<b>36</b>
Driving Change: A Sampling of Impactful ICLRS Projects	<b>38</b>

---

All communication should be sent to:

International Center for Law and Religion Studies, BYU Law  
452 JRCB, Provo, UT 84602 USA

PHONE: +1 801-422-6842 | EMAIL: [INFO@ICLRS.ORG](mailto:INFO@ICLRS.ORG) | WEB: [ICLRS.ORG](http://ICLRS.ORG)  
X: [@ICLRSORG](https://twitter.com/ICLRSORG) | INSTAGRAM: [@ICLRSBYULAW](https://www.instagram.com/ICLRSBYULAW) | FACEBOOK.COM/ICLRS.ORG

Published by the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at BYU Law and by BYU Brand & Creative. ©2026 Brigham Young University. All rights reserved.



## Leading the Way for Religious Freedom

*For a quarter century, the International Center for Law and Religion Studies has provided opportunities for leaders and scholars from around the world to work together for religious freedom for everyone everywhere.*

When Cole Durham was elected secretary of the American Society of Comparative Law in 1989, the field of law and religion was relatively small, and any scholarship on the topic was primarily focused on the United States. But as the Berlin Wall fell and the governments of Eastern Europe found themselves in upheaval, Durham was literally in the right place at the right time. Utilizing his secretary title and his expertise in comparative law, Durham found himself consulting on law reform and constitution-making throughout Eastern Europe, organizing comparative law conferences, and weaving together a network of experts who could share ideas, collaborate, and contribute to publications.

Durham would later become a member of the Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). As he worked with governments, it became clear that he needed an institutional base to provide support; to fill this need, the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS) was established within the BYU Law School on 1 January 2000.

From two employees at its founding—Durham as director and Elizabeth Clark as associate director—the Center has experienced remarkable growth over the last 25 years. Brett Scharffs currently serves as director, although Durham remains fully involved as founding director. Clark continues her work alongside five other associate directors. Deborah Wright, who joined soon after the founding, runs a tight ship as the Center’s coordinator and executive assistant, working with two conference liaisons, a communications specialist, and a donor liaison who help with Center logistics.

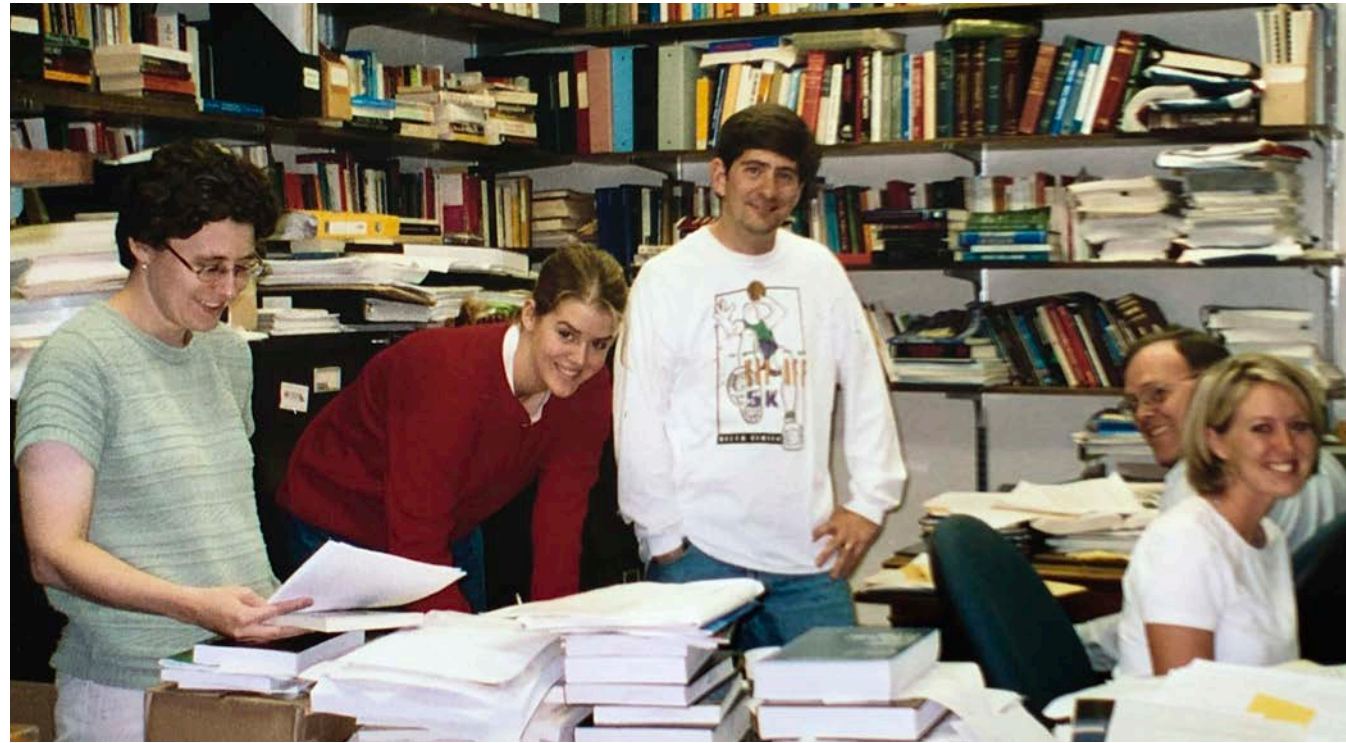
While the Center itself maintains a small footprint, it has played a major role in developing the field of law and religion and in training and mentoring other experts throughout the world.

“Religious freedom is too big a topic for us to do it all,” explains Clark. “We have to do it with other people. And that’s the only way to do it right. We can help lift people from different faith traditions and different countries who are interested in this field and give them opportunities. It’s fascinating to see the impact that these people go on to have.”

As set forth in its mission statement, the ICLRS strives “to help secure the blessings of freedom of religion and belief for all people.” Since the early days when the focus was primarily on Eastern Europe, the Center has broadened its reach and helped to establish local consortia of scholars, government officials, and religious leaders who are engaged in law and religion in areas throughout the world. Clark continues to focus on eastern Europe and central Asia. Gary Doxey and Betsy Bennion focus on Latin America; Paul Kerry and Amy Andrus focus on Europe; and Hannah Clayson Smith focuses on Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Scharffs and Durham can be found in any of those regions over the course of a year.

As part of its outreach, the Center has hosted or been involved in 1,275 events in 95 countries. The Center’s signature event—the Annual International Law and Religion Symposium, which brings delegates from around the world to BYU’s Law School—just wrapped its 32nd year.

Scholarship on law and religion was scarce in the early days, so ICLRS personnel stepped in to help meet that need. The Center is responsible for several first-of-its-kind publications, including *Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives*, more commonly known as “the Casebook” (see page 38). Donlu Thayer oversaw much of the editing of the Center’s work in the early days, then Jane Wise took up the mantle. Since Wise’s retirement in 2022, Associate Director Amy Andrus has continued that work. By the end of 2025, Center staff had produced 338 law- and religion-related publications, 289 of those in the last 25 years.



As the field of law and religion has grown, ICLRS has remained committed to its founding principles. The Center maintains its focus on international law and religion issues, particularly religious freedom. “[Durham’s] work began as a comparativist and as an international-law scholar,” says Scharffs. “The first word in our name, the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, sets us apart and is the focus of who we are.” He also notes that the first principle of the Center is that it is first and foremost an academic center focused on religion and the rule of law. “We’re lawyers,” says Scharffs. “And by focusing on the law, we can do a lot of good.”

The second core principle is that relationships matter. “Opportunities have come as we’ve built trust and have been able to build relationships,” says Clark. “There are many centers that publish, and we publish too. We want strong academic materials and credentials—that’s an important part of lifting the field. But we also seek to serve by bringing people together who are concerned about these issues, about ways of trying to improve laws throughout the world.”

Throughout its existence, the Center has sought to lift and support scholars and practitioners globally. This work has intensified in recent years with the Young Scholars Fellowship on Religion and the Rule of Law (see page 40), the sponsorship of international LLM scholars at BYU Law, the Rising Generation Initiative, and the many opportunities available to BYU JD students. All these programs seek to support and train the next generation of law-and-religion scholars.

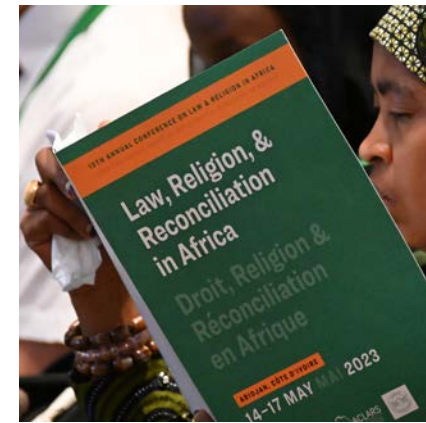
In addition, as religious freedom has become more politicized, the Center has made a conscious effort to bring people together in peaceful dialogue. One of those ways is by focusing on human dignity. Since 2018 the Center has promoted human dignity as another way to view human rights (see page 12). At a recent conference, an Indigenous religious leader thanked a staff member for giving him a seat at the table. This was an important reminder that religious freedom is for all, regardless of belief.

“We want to be standing up for everyone, and it doesn’t matter whether others have always stood up for us or not,” says Scharffs.

Clark agrees. “It’s not hard for a religion to stand up for itself,” she says. But to really be of service to those who care about religious freedom, all stakeholders need to stand up for each other. “These are all people who care deeply about these issues,” she says. “They all have something to learn, and they all have something to give.”

As ICLRS looks back on its rich history and looks forward to the future, the Center remains committed to building and supporting the field of law and religion as well as freedom of religion or belief for everyone everywhere. “I think we are on a trajectory of continuation,” says Scharffs. “This is a field in its adolescence. There’s going to be a lot of growth in the field of law and religion over the next 25 years, and I think it will remain a very dynamic and interesting field.”

“We’ve been blessed with incredible support and chances as we’ve helped build the field of comparative law and religion over the past 25 years,” adds Clark. “We look forward to the opportunities the next 25 years will bring.”



## MILESTONES IN THE WORK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# TIMEELINE

1990

**1994**

First International Church-State Symposium held at BYU Law.

According to Founding Director Cole Durham, this event was put together with “Scotch tape and bobby pins,” but it paved the way for the Annual International Law and Religion Symposium, the Center’s signature event. At the 2018 Symposium, Durham said, “Twenty-five years ago, I had a dream of annual conferences that could attract practitioners from around the world. What you have experienced over the past two days is an outgrowth of that early dream. What you have seen is the result of the dedication, consecration, and work of people far too numerous to mention.”

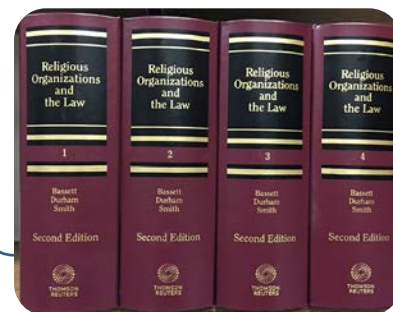
**1994**

Cole Durham began teaching at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary.

**1997**

*Religious Organizations and the Law* (“the Treatise”) published.

This resource was originated by William W. Bassett, a law professor at the University of San Francisco; on his retirement, he passed the project on to the Center to ensure that it would continue. Under the direction of Cole Durham and Robert Smith, the Treatise has expanded to four volumes that are updated annually.

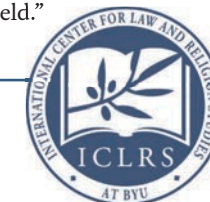


2000

**2000**

International Center for Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS) officially established on 1 January at BYU.

The Center has essentially planted and cultivated the field of comparative law and religion. Director Brett Scharffs said of the Center’s work, “From an international comparative perspective, when Professor Durham began working in the field, there was very little in terms of scholarship. Today there is a vibrant field of law and religion. Our Center has been at the forefront. It is a bold claim to speak of ourselves as field makers, but I think if you were to ask law and religion scholars around the world, there would be an acknowledgment of the leadership of Professor Durham and the Center in the creation and the continuing vibrancy of this field.”



**2000**

Latin American Consortium for Religious Freedom founded.

**2004**

*Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook* (“the Deskbook”) published.



2005

**2007**  
Brett Scharffs joined Cole Durham as a guest professor at CEU in Budapest.

**2007**  
International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ICLARS) founded.  
  
Cole Durham served as president from 2011 to 2016. The ICLARS, which regularly organizes conferences and publishes a book series with Routledge, is open to all who are interested in matters concerning law and religion, without regard to political or religious opinions.

2010

**2010**  
*Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives* (“the Casebook”) published.



**2009**  
First ICLARS conference held.

**2009**  
First FoRB training course for lawyers took place in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



**2014**  
African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) founded.

Its first event gathered scholars from 13 African countries, and for some, this was their first opportunity to gather and network with other African scholars in the field of law and religion. Now, 11 years later, ACLARS receives hundreds of submissions for presentations at its annual conference and publishes a volume of select presentations from that conference each year. The 2019 conference also produced African Perspectives on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere, an endorsement and elaboration of the Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere.



2015

**2012**  
*Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* founded, with Cole Durham as a founding editor.

**2012**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Beijing, China.

The program was a collaborative effort between ICLRS, Peking University Law School's Center for Administrative and Constitutional Law, the Pu Shi Institute for Social Sciences, and the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE). Seventeen experts and scholars from six countries taught at the program, and 59 students—including researchers in subjects such as law, religious studies, and political science—attended. Additional participants came from the judicial branch and religious communities.

**2014**  
G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) founded.

**2014**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Indonesia.

**2014**  
First Religious Freedom Annual Review held.





**2015**  
West African Regional Center for Law and Religion Studies (WARCLARS) founded.

**2015**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Myanmar.



**2017**  
South Asia Consortium for Religion and Law Studies (SACRALS) established.



**2019**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Uzbekistan.

**2019**  
Second edition of the Casebook published.

**2019**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Laos.



**RISING GENERATION**

**2024**  
Rising Generation Initiative established.

2015

**2016**  
First-of-its-kind master's degree in Sharia and human rights offered in Indonesia.

**2016**  
*Encyclopedia of Law and Religion* published, with Gerhard Robbers and Cole Durham as editors.

**2016**  
Certificate Training Program in Religion and the Rule of Law first held in Nigeria.

The Center has continued to partner with universities in Nigeria and, most recently, is partnering with the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS)—which is affiliated with the Supreme Court of Nigeria—and several academic partners to develop a national curriculum introducing a law and religion course into Nigerian law schools. Nearly all 100 law schools have been represented at the curriculum development colloquiums held in 2024 and 2025.



**2018**  
Young Scholars Fellowship on Religion and the Rule of Law hosted first cohort at Christ Church, Oxford.

**2018**  
Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere adopted.

The Punta del Este Declaration commemorated the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), celebrating its recognition of human dignity at the core of the panoply of human rights and recommitting to protecting human dignity for everyone everywhere. The declaration was adopted at a conference convened in Punta del Este, Uruguay, 2-4 December 2018, shortly before the formal 70th anniversary of the UDHR on 10 December 2018.

2020

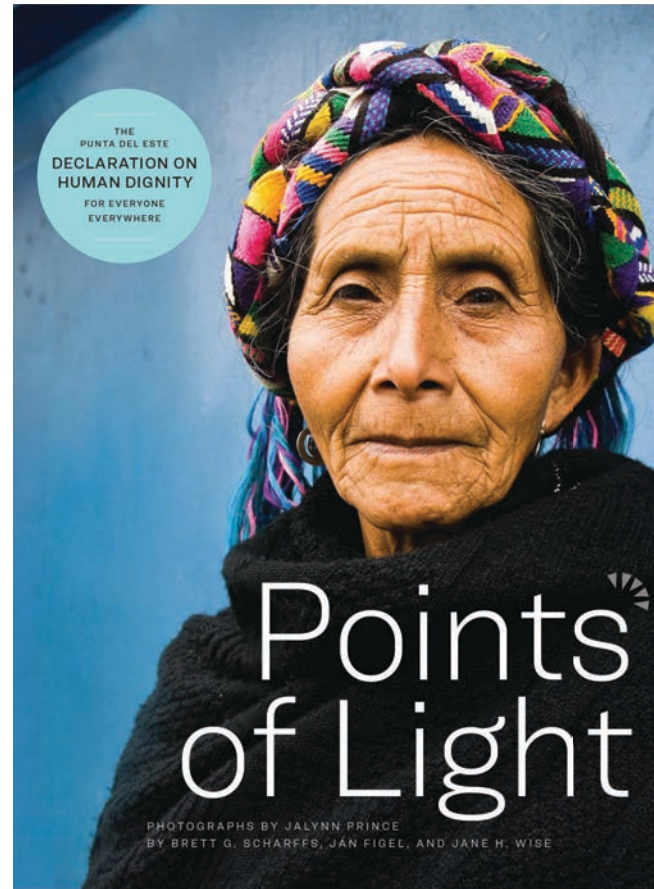
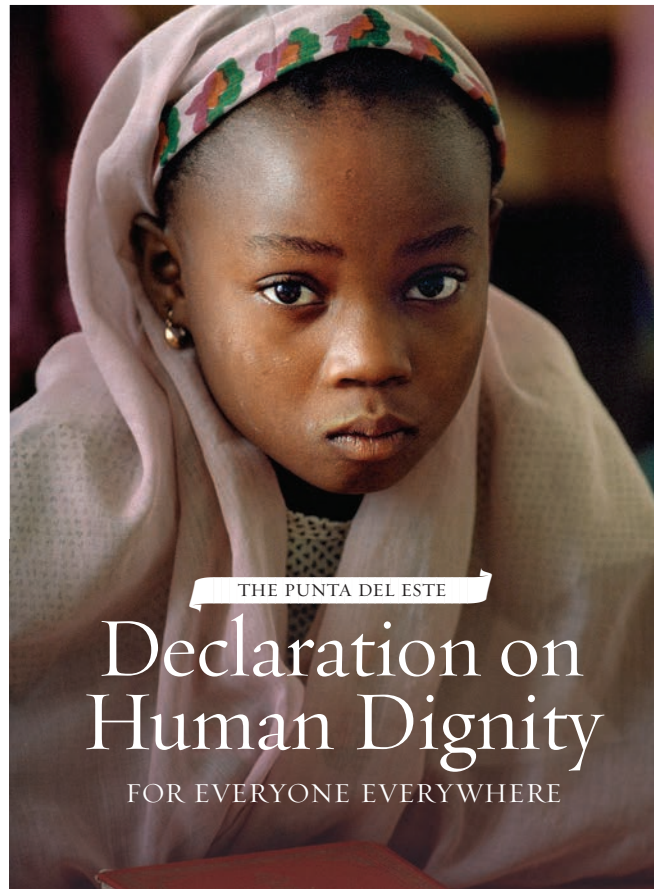


**HUMAN DIGNITY**  
FOR EVERYONE EVERYWHERE



**2023**  
Religious Freedom Alliance Council established.





# Human Dignity as a Center Initiative

On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states that “the inherent dignity and . . . the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [are] the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

On the UDHR’s 70th anniversary, an international group of scholars, human rights experts, and political and religious leaders met in Punta del Este, Uruguay, to create the Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere.

Article One of the Declaration states: “The inherent human dignity of all people and the importance of respecting, promoting, and protecting human dignity for everyone everywhere

is the foundational principle and the key objective or goal of human rights.” The creators of the Punta del Este Declaration and the drafters of the UDHR—representatives of a variety of legal and cultural backgrounds from all over the world—found in the universal value of human dignity a concept that expressed the intrinsic worth of each human being.

As a Center, we believe that human dignity is the foundation of the most fundamental human right: the right to be treated with the respect due to all persons because they are human. We believe that a true understanding of personal dignity brings a balance of human rights and obligations, builds common understanding, reconciles competing human rights claims, and helps realize a better world.

## HUMAN DIGNITY PUBLICATIONS

In the year leading up to the Punta del Este Declaration and in the years since, numerous conferences have been dedicated to human dignity. Blog posts, articles, and books have been written on the subject, and an effort was made to introduce a United Nation’s Resolution to establish 10 June as an International Day Affirming Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere. From the beginning, ICLRS has been on the forefront of these efforts. Following is a list of publications by Center personnel that discuss human dignity.

*New Perspectives on Human Dignity in Asia: Cross-Cultural Interpretations and Dialogue*, edited by Brett G. Scharffs, Hannah Clayson Smith, and Emily H. Butler, Routledge, 2026.

*The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, volume 23, issue 3 (2025) features original research, most of which was presented at a workshop hosted by ICLRS at Christ Church, Oxford University, in July 2024.

**Article in this issue by Center staff:** “Human Dignity as a Tool for Differentiating Between Maleficent and Beneficent Uses of Artificial Intelligence,” by Brett G. Scharffs and Alexandra Brown, doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2025.2531652.

*Human Dignity, Judicial Reasoning, and the Law: Comparative Perspectives on a Key Constitutional Concept*, edited by Brett G. Scharffs, Andrea Pin, and Dmytro Vovk, Routledge, 2024.

“Building Bridges Between Freedom of Religion and Belief and Other Fundamental Human Rights,” by Brett G. Scharffs, in *Fundamental Rights, Religion and Human Dignity: A Constitutional Journey*, edited by Javier Martínez-Torrón and Li-ann Thio, Routledge, 2024.

*The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, volume 21, issue 4 (2023) was the result of a conference held at Christ Church, Oxford

University, in July 2023 that focused on faith and the founding figures of the UDHR.

**Articles in this issue by Center staff:** “Introduction: Faith and the Founding Figures of Human Dignity,” by Brett G. Scharffs, doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2023.2272439.

“The Loveliness Men Hide: Eleanor Roosevelt on Human Dignity,” by Brett G. Scharffs, Leah Blake, Kimberley Farnsworth, Holly Hinckley Lesan, and Marianna Richardson, doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2023.2272440.

*African Conceptions of Human Dignity*, edited by Brett G. Scharffs, M. Christian Green, and Simeon O. Ilesanmi, African Sun Media, 2023.

“Professor Scharffs in Bukhara, Uzbekistan: Human Dignity—From the Punta del Este Declaration to the Bukhara Declaration,” by Brett G. Scharffs, *Talk About: Law and Religion* (blog), International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 23 May 2022, talkabout.iclrs.org/2022/05/23/punta-del-este-declaration-respect.

*Points of Light: The Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere*, by Brett G. Scharffs, Ján Figel’, and Jane Wise, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 2021.

*Dignity and International Human Rights Law: An Introduction to the Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere*, by Brett G. Scharffs and Ewelina U. Ochab, Routledge, 2022.

“Christianity, Human Rights, and Dignity: Squaring the Triangle,” by Brett G. Scharffs, Andrea Pin, and Dmytro Vovk, *Talk About: Law and Religion* (blog), International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 26 August 2021, talkabout.iclrs.org/2021/08/26/squaring-the-triangle.



# *DIGNITAS INFINITA*

A CHRISTIAN PROPOSAL FOR A PLURALIST SOCIETY

Presentation of  
President D. Todd Christofferson

Conference on Infinite Dignity, Human Freedom, and the Place of Law  
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome, Italy  
23 September 2025



President D. Todd Christofferson, now a member of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was serving in the Church's Quorum of the Twelve when he spoke in Rome. Here, he greets fellow speaker Monsignor Riccardo Bollati of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith.

## Preliminaries

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Riccardo Bollati of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and all the persons involved in the creation and promulgation of *Dignitas Infinita*. Professor Bollati's profound and inspiring address this morning has set the tone for a very meaningful conference, and I am honored to be a part of it.

I also want to thank the organizing committee and everyone who is participating today.

On behalf of Russell M. Nelson, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we offer our condolences on the passing of Pope Francis and acknowledge his legacy of "courageous and compassionate leadership."<sup>1</sup> It is no coincidence that *Dignitas Infinita* was promulgated during the pontificate of Pope Francis, who magnified human dignity through "his example of forgiveness, . . . service,"<sup>2</sup> and care for the most vulnerable among us. Pope Francis, in his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, said:

*The dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations. . . . That every human being possesses an inalienable dignity is a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change. For this reason, human beings have the same inviolable dignity in every age of history.*<sup>3</sup>

I congratulate the Catholic Church on the recent election of Pope Leo XIV and send my warmest regards to him. I admire Pope Leo's "lifetime of faith and admirable character"<sup>4</sup> and anticipate that human dignity will be a key theme in his pontificate.

Respect for human dignity is important to me personally and as a representative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; it is important to Russell M. Nelson, the prophet and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and it is important to all the leaders and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We see common ground and look forward to mutually supportive efforts with the Catholic Church and Pope Leo in affirming and fostering human dignity.

\* \* \*

Today I would like to focus my remarks on three key documents and their themes as we consider Christianity and a pluralistic society:

- First, *Dignitas Infinita* and the deep theological rooting of human dignity in the life and person of Jesus Christ and in His divine role as the Savior of mankind.
- Second, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the monumental Vatican II

declaration on the Catholic Church's doctrine of religious freedom. Not only do I want to reflect on the right to religious freedom that this declaration boldly sets forth but also its clarification on the duties that individuals and society have to seek and adhere to truth. Here, I will highlight the important themes of moral agency and religious pluralism.

• Third, and perhaps less obviously, the 1891 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, which highlights the dignity of workers. I find *Rerum Novarum*'s teachings on human dignity particularly relevant to navigating the political controversies we face today and to sustaining a healthy pluralism in society.

## I. *Dignitas Infinita*

Let me begin with *Dignitas Infinita*, the subject of this conference. *Dignitas Infinita* opens with a bold assertion about the inherent dignity of all people:

*Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter.*<sup>5</sup>

Although the concept of human dignity is recognized by many groups and individuals, *Dignitas Infinita* provides us with a deeply Christian conception of human dignity. Each human being possesses inherent dignity "simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God."<sup>6</sup> The ontological basis of human dignity is the love of God and is in no way based upon the circumstances or conditions in which a person lives.

This infinite dignity creates for each human person a responsibility to treat every other human person with love and respect. This is not an abstract duty. It is rooted in the person and example of Jesus Christ, who calls us to act in accordance with our "nature as creatures who are loved by God and called to love others" and to exercise our freedom in alignment with "the law of love revealed by the Gospel."<sup>7</sup> The scriptures abound with teachings on justice and the importance of caring for the poor and downtrodden. Jesus's own life, characterized by humble circumstances, demonstrated the dignity and worth of all people in all circumstances. Jesus sought out those who were rejected by society and affirmed "the value and dignity of all who bear the image of God, regardless of their social status and external circumstances."<sup>8</sup> Pope St. John Paul II asserted that human dignity is "a Gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator."<sup>9</sup>

Christ's incarnation is the highest evidence of the value of all human souls. As stated in *Dignitas Infinita*:

*The dignity of the human person was revealed in its fullness when the Father sent his Son, who assumed human existence to the full. . . . By proclaiming that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor, the humble, the despised, and those who suffer in body and spirit; by*



Right: President Christofferson speaks on infinite dignity, human freedom, and the place of law.

Below: Conference attendees listen to presentations by Monsignor Bollati and President Christofferson.



healing all sorts of illnesses and infirmities, even the most dramatic ones, such as leprosy; by affirming that whatever is done to these individuals is also done to him because he is present in them: in all these ways, Jesus brought the great novelty of recognizing the dignity of every person, especially those who were considered “unworthy.”<sup>10</sup>

Pope Francis invited the Church to “believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love, . . . realizing that ‘he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity.’”<sup>11</sup> For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term *infinite* holds a unique meaning. Like other Christians, we, too, believe that life continues after death. However, we also believe that our existence began before our mortal lives, and that our relationship with God stretches on infinitely before as well as after our mortal lives. As a fellow Latter-day Saint apostle explained:

*There is one important identity we all share now and forever, one that we should never ever lose sight of, and one that we should be grateful for. That is that you are and have always been a son or daughter of God with spiritual roots in eternity. . . .*

*. . . Understanding this truth—really understanding it and embracing it—is life changing. It gives you an extraordinary identity that no one can ever take away from you. But more than that, it should give you an enormous feeling of value and a sense of your infinite worth. Finally, it provides you a divine, noble, and worthy purpose in life.<sup>12</sup>*

While all humans possess an unalterable ontological dignity, *Dignitas Infinita* recognizes that we possess moral dignity as well. Unlike ontological dignity, moral dignity can be lost when humans violate moral principles and stray from the light: “While people are endowed with conscience, they can always act against it.”<sup>13</sup>

*Dignitas Infinita* invites us to honor our moral dignity by reminding us that “the Creator calls each person to know him, to love him, and to live in a covenantal relationship with him, while calling the person also to live in fraternity, justice, and peace with all others.”<sup>14</sup> This covenantal relationship is a vital aspect of our discipleship. President Russell M. Nelson has said that

*every man and every woman who participates in priesthood ordinances and who makes and keeps covenants with God has direct access to the power of God. We take the Lord’s name upon ourselves as individuals. We also take His name upon us as a people.<sup>15</sup>*

As *Dignitas Infinita* reminds us, “Respect for the dignity of each person is the indispensable basis for the existence of any society that claims to be founded on just law and not on the force of power.”<sup>16</sup> As further explained in *Dignitas Infinita*:

*Human dignity helps to overcome the narrow perspective of a self-referential and individualistic freedom that claims to create its own values regardless of the objective norms of the good and of our relationship with other living beings.<sup>17</sup>*

Fully embracing the Creator’s call to love Him and live in peace with others aids our development as disciples of Christ and as people. Those who are truly devoted to the Savior recognize that religion is not just about doing good but about becoming good. *Dignitas Infinita* asserts that “the ultimate destiny of human beings” is “to grow under the action of the Holy Spirit to reflect the glory of the Father in that same image and to share in eternal life.”<sup>18</sup> The theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reflects the same understanding. The Book of Mormon, one of our books of scripture alongside the Holy Bible, encourages men and women to

*pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with [the pure love of Christ], which [the Father] hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.<sup>19</sup>*

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints understand that the purpose of our life on earth is to fulfill this invitation—to become more like our Savior and develop His divine attributes. As we become better, more holy, and more like Christ, our “likeness to God” grows and, in the words of *Dignitas Infinita*, we “attain [our] highest dignity.”<sup>20</sup>

As a brother in Christ, the call of *Dignitas Infinita* resonates with me. I am deeply grateful for this document and its assertion of gospel truths, which provide us with a reminder of the divinity of Christ and our responsibilities as His disciples. I am also grateful for this particular conception of human dignity, which among the many other conceptions, is clearly and profoundly centered not just on the truth that we are created in the image of God but that Jesus Christ is our Exemplar and our Redeemer.

## II. *Dignitatis Humanae*

The second document I would like to focus on is the 1965 Declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*. *Dignitatis Humanae* is a monumental achievement in the history of religious freedom. It is a significant theological exegesis of human dignity as the basis for the right to religious freedom and of the social duties we all have to protect and promote this sacred right. *Dignitatis Humanae* importantly recognizes that the shared responsibility for promoting and preserving religious freedom lies with governments and individuals.

Governments have a duty to promote the common welfare by protecting inviolable human rights and safeguarding the

equality of citizens under the law.<sup>21</sup> These duties necessitate protecting religious freedom and fostering favorable conditions for religious life to facilitate the living and sharing of truth.<sup>22</sup> As I have noted elsewhere, when governments protect religious freedom, the common welfare benefits: “Governments that protect religious freedom have fewer social conflicts and greater levels of social cohesion.”<sup>23</sup>

Individuals also bear an essential responsibility in preserving and promoting religious freedom. It is our social responsibility “to have respect both for the rights of others,” “for [our] own duties toward others,” and “for the common welfare of all.”<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis beautifully described this reciprocal social responsibility to others, saying, “We need each other, and are entrusted to each other’s care.”<sup>25</sup>

The associational value of human dignity also reminds us that religious freedom is important because of the virtues and values that it promotes. Societies that value religious freedom foster citizens who are open-minded, curious, and tolerant, who seek and value the truth. Societies that value religious freedom will encourage habits of the heart such as reverence, awe, and wonder, as well as faith, hope, and charity and traits of character such as humility, kindness, respect, and love. Societies that value religious freedom will encourage people to develop habits of serving and volunteering in their communities, of building social bonds that are especially important at a time when there is so much evidence of twin crises of loneliness and an absence of meaning in peoples’ lives. Religious freedom is closely tied to developing communities where human flourishing is possible.<sup>26</sup>

*Dignitatis Humanae* also reminds us that religious freedom is a necessary element “to the creation of an environment in which men [and women] can without hindrance be invited to the Christian faith, embrace it of their own free will, and profess it effectively in their whole manner of life.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, religious freedom fosters an environment in which individuals may exercise moral agency.

Moral agency, “the right of choice to live our lives according to the truth as we understand it,”<sup>28</sup> is essential to the divine plan. *Dignitatis Humanae* profoundly articulates that individuals, as creations of God endowed with moral agency and made to participate in divine law, are “bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth” and are “bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known.”<sup>29</sup> One of my fellow leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints taught that although God desires for us to follow His commandments and live in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ, “He gives us the dignity of choosing.”<sup>30</sup>

While both The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Catholic Church hope that all men and women will “come to God, the end and purpose of life,”<sup>31</sup> we understand that religious freedom and moral agency will inevitably lead individuals to divergent judgments of conscience. Thus, in

Top: The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, Italy, was the site of the Infinite Dignity, Human Freedom, and Place of Law conference.

Bottom: Participants gain new insights during the conference.





President Christofferson walks with his wife, Kathy, in the halls of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

Opposite page: Co-organizers of the conference: (top) Brett G. Scharffs, director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, BYU Law; (middle) Andrea Pin, professor of comparative law, University of Padua; and (bottom) Arturo Bolloca, professor of moral theology, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

addition to our “grave obligation toward Christ . . . to understand the truth received from Him, faithfully to proclaim it, and vigorously to defend it,” we must also honor our equally grave obligation to have charity, love, “prudence, and patience”<sup>32</sup> with our brothers and sisters who have chosen different paths. Pope St. John Paul II observed that “true religious freedom shuns the temptation to intolerance and sectarianism, and promotes attitudes of respect and constructive dialogue,” thus “contribut[ing] decisively to human fraternity.”<sup>33</sup> Here is found the foundation for what one has called a “confident pluralism”<sup>34</sup> in society.

Studies show that in most countries with high legal restrictions on religious freedom and high levels of social hostilities involving religion, “there is almost always a dominant religious group that is a majority or supermajority.”<sup>35</sup> However, Professor Brett Scharffs, director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University, has detailed that in countries with a Catholic majority or supermajority, almost none have high legal restrictions or social hostilities involving religion.<sup>36</sup> Professor Scharffs concluded that *Dignitatis Humanae*’s bold doctrine of religious freedom likely played a role “in this remarkable pattern of low legal restrictions and social hostilities in Catholic-majority countries.”<sup>37</sup>

*Dignitatis Humanae* counsels us to seek and live divine truth, to encourage our governments to protect the inviolable right to religious freedom, and to deal “in justice and civility”<sup>38</sup> with our brothers and sisters, respecting the rights of all and maximizing our duty to all. In the words of Pope Paul VI:

*In order that relationships of peace and harmony be established and maintained within the whole of mankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society.*<sup>39</sup>

### III. *Rerum Novarum*

For my third observation, I reach much further back in time to 1891 and Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, which Pope Leo XIV cited as an inspiration in selecting his papal name.<sup>40</sup> Some commentators have speculated that Pope Leo XIV’s choice of name recognized that

*Leo XIII laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, envisioning a Church that did not act as a direct player in the conflicts of the day but instead stood above them, offering a broader moral vision rooted in human dignity.*<sup>41</sup>

I am in no position to judge the accuracy of this speculation, but I do like the idea.

*Rerum Novarum* was issued as a response to then-contemporary debates between socialists and capitalists. Rather than limiting himself to the political camps of the day, Pope Leo XIII acknowledged that there are questions for which “no practical solution . . . will be found apart from the intervention of religion



and of the Church.”<sup>42</sup> By focusing on principles of duty, labor, virtue, and charity, Pope Leo XIII showed that the gospel provides a higher and more truth-based method of engaging with political debates. He affirmed

*without hesitation that all the striving of men will be vain if they leave out the Church. It is the Church that insists, on the authority of the Gospel, upon those teachings whereby the conflict can be brought to an end, or rendered, at least, far less bitter; the Church uses her efforts not only to enlighten the mind, but to direct by her precepts the life and conduct of each and all.*<sup>43</sup>

Using the terminology of *Dignitas Infinita*, the Church uses her efforts to inspire all to honor their ontological dignity by choosing moral dignity. Pope Leo XIII affirmed that religion is not just about *doing* good but about *becoming* good as individuals and as societies.

*Rerum Novarum* also emphasized the inherent moral qualities of humans and the importance of treating all men with dignity:

*From contemplation of this divine Model, it is more easy to understand that the true worth and nobility of man lie in his moral qualities, that is, in virtue; that virtue is, moreover, the common inheritance of men, equally within the reach of high and low, rich and poor; and that virtue, and virtue alone, wherever found, will be followed by the rewards of everlasting happiness.*<sup>44</sup>

Virtue, morality, and dignity belong to all human beings, regardless of circumstance.

Recognizing our shared dignity allows us to look beyond our differences and reminds us of what is most important about being human. Pope Leo XIII asserted that this shared morality would inspire landowners to engage in charitable efforts more willingly:

*Whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and material, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God's providence, for the benefit of others.*<sup>45</sup>

He invited laborers, too, to be reconciled with landowners, reminding them of the dignity and value of labor and asserting that it is “just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor.”<sup>46</sup> By adhering to true gospel principles, Pope Leo XIII engaged with the debate while refusing to align with the extremism of either side.

In our day, we likewise understand that there is often no “right side” to political divides, and that entrenched sides of partisan debates contain elements of truth while being incomplete or flawed. Standing above the debates and focusing on true principles such as human dignity provides a mechanism to help us navigate these controversies.

As Pope Leo XIII stressed in *Rerum Novarum*:

*The Church possesses a power peculiarly her own. The instruments which she employs are given to her by Jesus Christ Himself for the very purpose of reaching the hearts of men, and drive their efficiency from God. They alone can reach the innermost heart and conscience, and bring men to act from a motive of duty, to control their passions and appetites, to love God and their fellow men with a love that is outstanding and of the highest degree and to break down courageously every barrier which blocks the way to virtue.*<sup>47</sup>

*Rerum Novarum* reminds us that as disciples of Christ, we can still engage with issues while remaining above partisanship. We do this by speaking religious truths that may not be entirely in accord with either side of debates and by continuously adhering to those principles. As explained by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, when these

*precepts prevail, the respective classes will not only be united in the bonds of friendship, but also in those of brotherly love. For they will understand and feel that all men are children of the same common Father, who is God.*<sup>48</sup>

In today’s world, religious leaders face similar challenges to those that inspired *Rerum Novarum*. Conflicts within societies across the world demand the attention of religious leaders. A focus on the shared dignity of all humans on all sides of

Virtue, morality, and dignity belong to all human beings, regardless of circumstance. Recognizing our shared dignity allows us to look beyond our differences and reminds us of what is most important about being human.

–President D. Todd Christofferson



President Christofferson meets with a Catholic priest on the university's rooftop terrace.

all conflicts will lead us toward more peaceful, loving, and tolerant societies. As stated in *Rerum Novarum*:

*“If sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and co-heirs with Christ.” Such is the scheme of duties and of rights which is shown forth to the world by the Gospel. Would it not seem that, were society penetrated with ideas like these, strife must quickly cease?*”<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

Exactly two weeks ago, the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Russell M. Nelson, celebrated his 101st birthday, noting, “Living to 101 is a privilege I never anticipated.” He has witnessed uncounted changes over the last century, but his birthday message was about unchanging truths. Under the title “We All Deserve Dignity and Respect,” his words coincide with the teachings we are discussing today. President Nelson wrote:

*Each of us has inherent worth and dignity. I believe we are all children of a loving Heavenly Father. But no matter your religion or spirituality, recognizing the underlying truth beneath this belief that we all deserve dignity is liberating—it brings emotional, mental, and spiritual equilibrium. . . .*

*. . . A century of experience has taught me this with certainty: anger never persuades, hostility never heals, and contention never leads to lasting solutions. . . .*

*. . . If we embrace these eternal truths—honoring our own worth, treating others with dignity, and nurturing our families—our lives, and our world, will be steadier and more joyful.*<sup>50</sup>

I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to address you today and for our shared commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ.

As disciples of Christ, we have a solemn responsibility to advocate for human dignity, moral agency, and religious pluralism. I am deeply appreciative of the Catholic Church’s commitment to these concepts and for the shared values of our two churches.

May the truths contained in *Dignitas Infinita*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Rerum Novarum* help guide us as we seek to promote human dignity and rise above the perilous divisions of our time.

It is my firm conviction, even knowledge, that Jesus Christ is our living, resurrected Redeemer, and that, in the words of the scripture, “the Father . . . hath given all things into his hand.”<sup>51</sup> I humbly pray for His blessing upon each and all of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.



A reflection of a building on the Piazza Navona near the university.

### Notes

1. “First Presidency Offers Condolences on Passing of His Holiness Pope Francis,” Official Statement, Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 21 April 2025, [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-condolences-his-holiness-pope-francis](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-condolences-his-holiness-pope-francis).
2. “First Presidency Offers Condolences on Passing of His Holiness Pope Francis.”
3. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* [On Fraternity and Social Friendship], The Holy See, 3 October 2020, section 213, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html).
4. “The First Presidency Offers a Message of Goodwill to Pope Leo XIV,” Official Statement, Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 19 May 2025, [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-message-new-pope](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-message-new-pope).
5. *Dignitas Infinita*, The Holy See, 25 March 2024, paragraph 1, [vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_dcf\\_doc\\_20240402\\_dignitas-infinita\\_en.html](https://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dcf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html).
6. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 7.
7. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 7.
8. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 12.
9. Pope St. John Paul II, quoted in *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 4; from Pope John Paul II, *Address to the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate*, Puebla, Mexico, 28 January 1979, section III.1, [vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19790128\\_messico-puebla-episc-latam.html](https://vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790128_messico-puebla-episc-latam.html).
10. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 19.
11. Pope Francis, quoted in *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 6; from apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 178: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 105 (2013), 1094, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#Confession\\_of\\_faith\\_and\\_commitment\\_to\\_society](https://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Confession_of_faith_and_commitment_to_society); quoting Pope St. John Paul II, “Message to the Handicapped,” *Angelus*, Osnabrück, Germany (16 November 1980): *Insegnamenti III/2* (1980), 1232, [vatican.va.translate.google.com/content/john-paul-ii/de/angelus/1980/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19801116.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://vatican.va.translate.google.com/content/john-paul-ii/de/angelus/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19801116.html?_x_tr_sl=de&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc).
12. M. Russell Ballard, “Children of Heavenly Father,” Brigham Young University devotional address, 3 March 2020, [speeches.byu.edu/talks/m-russell-ballard/children-heavenly-father](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/m-russell-ballard/children-heavenly-father).
13. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 7.
14. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 18.
15. Russell M. Nelson, “The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022, 10, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/10/04-the-everlasting-covenant](https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/10/04-the-everlasting-covenant).
16. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 64.
17. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 26.
18. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraphs 20, 21.
19. Moroni 7:48; see also verse 47. See also 1 John 3:2–3.
20. *Dignitas Infinita*, paragraph 22.
21. See Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, The Holy See, 7 December 1965, section 7, paragraph 2, [vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).
22. See Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 6, paragraph 3.
23. D. Todd Christofferson, “Religious Liberty: The Basis of a Free and Just Society,” *Talk About: Law and Religion* (blog), BYU Law International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 8 January 2022, [talkabout.iclrs.org/2022/01/08/religious-liberty-the-basis-of-a-free-and-just-society](https://talkabout.iclrs.org/2022/01/08/religious-liberty-the-basis-of-a-free-and-just-society).
24. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 7, paragraph 1.
25. Pope Francis, address, *Meeting with the Leaders of Other Religions and Other Christian Denominations*, The Holy See, Tirana, Albania, 21 September 2014, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140921\\_albania-leaders-altre-religioni.html](https://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/september/documents/papa-francesco_20140921_albania-leaders-altre-religioni.html).
26. Empirical studies show that religiously active individuals are generally more involved in civic organizations, are more likely to volunteer in their communities, and give financially more—and more often—to both religious and secular causes, and are more actively engaged in democratic and political processes than their non-religious counterparts. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Religious Freedom—Protecting the Good Religion Does,” address given at the G20 Interfaith Forum, Fourth Plenary Session, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 27 September 2018; transcript available at Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 27 September 2018, [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/g20-interfaith-forum-transcript-elder-christofferson-religious-freedom](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/g20-interfaith-forum-transcript-elder-christofferson-religious-freedom). See also Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Impact of Religion and Religious Organizations,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 49, no. 1 (30 November 2023), 20–26, 32–36.
27. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 10, paragraph 1.
28. D. Todd Christofferson, Facebook, 29 November 2021, [facebook.com/share/p/17Scy2xPhy](https://facebook.com/share/p/17Scy2xPhy).
29. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 2, paragraph 3.
30. Dale G. Renlund, “Choose You This Day,” *Ensign*, November 2018, 105, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/choose-you-this-day](https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/choose-you-this-day).
31. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 3, paragraph 4.
32. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 14, paragraph 2.
33. Pope St. John Paul II, *Message from John Paul II to the Albanian Nation*, The Holy See, Tirana, Albania, 25 April 1993, [vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1993/april/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19930425\\_nazione-albanese.html](https://vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1993/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19930425_nazione-albanese.html).
34. See John D. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).
35. Brett G. Scharffs, “Religious Majorities and Restrictions on Religion,” *Notre Dame Law Review* 91, no. 4 (2016), 1443; see also 1419. See also “Religious Restrictions Around the World,” Pew Research Center, 18 December 2024, [pewresearch.org/religion/feature/religious-restrictions-around-the-world](https://pewresearch.org/religion/feature/religious-restrictions-around-the-world).
36. See Scharffs, “Religious Majorities and Restrictions on Religion,” 1419, 1443.
37. Scharffs, “Religious Majorities and Restrictions on Religion,” 1420; see also 1419.
38. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 7, paragraph 1.
39. Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, section 15, paragraph 2.
40. See Pope Leo XIV, *Speech of the Holy Father Leo XIV at the College of Cardinals*, The Holy See, 10 May 2025, [vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250510-collegio-cardinalizio.html](https://vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250510-collegio-cardinalizio.html). See also Salvatore Cernuzio, “The Pope: My Name for Leo XIII. The Church Responds to Challenges of Dignity, Justice, and Work,” *Vatican News*, 10 May 2025, [vaticannews.va/it/papa/news/2025-05/papa-leone-xiv-incontro-cardinali-conclave-vaticano-francesco.html](https://vaticannews.va/it/papa/news/2025-05/papa-leone-xiv-incontro-cardinali-conclave-vaticano-francesco.html).
41. Katherine Kelaidis, “The First American Pope Is Notable for Reasons You Might Not Expect,” *Vox*, 8 May 2025, [vox.com/religion/412142/new-pope-robert-prevost-american-leo-vatican-catholic](https://vox.com/religion/412142/new-pope-robert-prevost-american-leo-vatican-catholic).
42. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, The Holy See, 15 May 1891, paragraph 16, [vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](https://vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html).
43. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 16.
44. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 24.
45. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 22.
46. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 10.
47. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 26.
48. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 25.
49. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 25; quoting Romans 8:17.
50. Russell M. Nelson, “Russell M. Nelson: We All Deserve Dignity and Respect,” *Time*, 5 September 2025, [time.com/7315003/russell-nelson-dignity-respect](https://time.com/7315003/russell-nelson-dignity-respect).
51. John 3:35.

# LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

## BYU LAW SCHOOL DEANS REFLECT ON 25 YEARS OF ICLRS

To commemorate the Center's 25th anniversary, ICLRS Associate Directors Elizabeth A. Clark and Hannah Clayson Smith moderated a panel discussion that included five current and former BYU Law School deans—Dean H. Reese Hansen (1990–2004), Dean Kevin J. Worthen (2004–08), Dean James R. Rasband (2009–16), Dean D. Gordon Smith (2016–23), and Dean David H. Moore (2023–present)—at the annual International Advisory Council dinner held 3 April 2025 at the Grand America Hotel in Salt Lake City. The following transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** It's an honor for us to be joined by all five of the deans who have served the Law School during the existence of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (the Center). We note that Jim Gordon also served as interim dean (2008–09) between Dean Worthen and Dean Rasband.

On a personal note, I was hired in 2000 when the Center opened, and I've had the privilege of serving with each of these deans, so it's an honor to be here with them. We look forward to the discussion.

On the first day of classes in August 1973, then-BYU President Dallin H. Oaks observed, "We are frequently asked why Brigham Young University is establishing a law school at this time. The special mission of this law school and its graduates will unfold in time."<sup>1</sup> Here we are, 50 years on for the Law School, 25 for the Center.

Dean Hansen, what role do you see the Center having in the Law School's special mission, and how has that been unfolding?

**DEAN H. REESE HANSEN:** The special mission of the Law School was a matter of intense, ongoing discussion, with rumors back and forth, for a very long time. But none of us knew what the special mission was; it wasn't assigned.

One day, Founding Dean Rex Lee came to me and said, "I got a very interesting telephone call today from President Marion G. Romney. He was thinking about how we were doing and said, 'Rex, tell me, have you figured out why we established the Law School yet?'"

Well, without President Romney, there would be no Law School. And so Rex said to him, "You're asking me? I changed my whole life to help found the Law School, and you're asking me? Why?"

Then President Romney said the most interesting thing: There was no doubt in the minds of the First Presidency about establishing this law school. He said he had learned a long time ago to do as the Spirit moved him to do. He had learned to listen to that voice, but he had also learned that the rationale was often supplied later. President Romney said, "I just wanted to know if you have it yet."

Well, we don't have it all yet, but we have a part of it. We've got a glimmer because I'm very, very satisfied that the Center is at least one of the important special purposes that the Law School was created to fulfill.

We have to talk about the Center's Founding Director Cole Durham because without Cole, there would be no Center, just as without President Romney, there would be no Law School. Before the Center was established in 2000, Cole had, I think, sensed a calling. He had come to the Law School in 1976 and was working on religious freedom as a consultant and an academic; he was meeting the right people and going to the right places to establish his academic bona fides.

In November 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, and the world changed overnight. And Cole Durham was ready, prepared, and established as a respected academic voice on matters of religious freedom. Cole traveled around to former Soviet bloc countries, advising government leaders how to draft constitutional provisions that would provide adequate protection for religious freedom. It was

a relatively short period between the time Cole came to the Law School and when the Wall came down. The world changed, and he went to work. By the year 2000, he and the Law School were prepared and ready to go. Many others have helped along the way, but without Cole, there is no Center.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** Dean Worthen, when you were BYU president, you spoke at BYU Law School about the mission of BYU, noting that the university mission statement mentions students seven times, faculty only twice, and administration once.<sup>2</sup> I want to ask you, based on BYU's mission statement, how do you think the Center has served and blessed students, particularly BYU law students?

**PRESIDENT KEVIN J. WORTHEN:** As you say, BYU is a very student-centric university. Everything that happens at BYU is grounded in the students. I believe both Elizabeth and Hannah worked for Cole Durham as students before there was a Center. I remember, before the Center was created, watching students scramble around the Harmon Building, putting together packets for Symposium delegates. Like everything else at BYU, as the Center's operations expanded and became more formalized, student involvement did as well. There are now more students working for the Center, and they're more organized. A student Symposium Executive Committee of 25 to 30 students basically manages all logistics for the annual Symposium: the ground transportation, concierge services, documents, some hosting of delegates. In my observation, the students often make the greatest impression upon the delegates because they are unscripted; they are who they are, and they are so remarkably good at representing the Center.

The Center has developed many summer research fellows over the years, including our son Aaron. Summer fellows participate in internships and do research with the Church's Office of General

Counsel, either in Salt Lake City or in one of the many area legal offices around the world.

During the school year, a Student Management Board of 14 or 15 students does work similar to what Elizabeth and Hannah did as students—research and other work for the Center—but in a more organized way. And we've been introduced tonight to this year's 10 international LLM (Master of Laws) students, a group that has played a key role in Center work over the years. If you add up the numbers of these students and other volunteers in a given year, close to 100 students out of a student body of 360 are involved directly in what the Center is doing.

In addition—and I think this is often overlooked—law students have access to the brilliant minds in the Center and those who come to BYU for the Center's Symposia, lectures, research, and other events.

Undergraduates with special skills such as programming, photography, and videography are involved with Center work as well.

It's safe to say the Center has done more than its share to ensure that the university and the Law School remain student-centric entities.

**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** Elder Rasband, when you were dean of the Law School, you would often conclude your remarks to incoming students on the first day of class by quoting from the same address from President Oaks that I mentioned earlier. President Oaks said, "We are privileged to participate in this great venture. It is our duty to make it great. He who builds anything unto the Lord must build in quality and flinch at no sacrifice toward that end."<sup>3</sup> I've seen that kind of sacrifice from everyone in this room. I'm grateful to all in attendance and to all on the panel here tonight.

Could you comment on the Center's role as a world leader in the field of comparative law and religion and on its work in trying to promote religious freedom for everyone, everywhere?





**ELDER JAMES R. RASBAND:** Let me just say this about the statement “he who builds anything unto the Lord must build in quality and flinch at no sacrifice toward that end”: What President Oaks was trying to reflect on was *Why a law school?* He said that many people had speculated about this, but he was satisfied because the board of trustees—whom we regard as prophets, seers, and revelators—said we ought to have a law school. And he said the mission will unfold in time, but while it’s unfolding, we ought to build a great law school. So even before the creation of the Center, there was this effort to build a law school, which became the soil in which the Center could thrive. The Center needed the Law School itself to be strong. I believe the Center is part of the Law School’s special, still unfolding mission, just as Dean Hansen suggested.

About not flinching at any sacrifice toward that end, Elizabeth said it so well: So many in this room have sacrificed. Deborah Wright sacrifices so much. Over and over, I’ve been in hotel rooms around the world kneeling with Cole Durham in prayer, trying to figure out what we’re going to say at a presentation. And Brett Scharffs: We’ve laughed about the air miles he accumulates. But it is no small thing to go to country after country and try to get something started in Vietnam, in Myanmar, or in China, to bring scholars together and start the slow, methodical work of getting people thinking about law and religion and human dignity and creating a cadre of scholars who then are connected to us and can help us.

The Center and those who have served in the Center have truly flinched at no sacrifice to make it great, and I’m grateful for them.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** I served on the Law School’s board of advisors when Dean Smith was dean, and I recall on many occasions Dean Smith talking about the theme of innovation,

which was a real focus of his deanship. Dean Smith, you have cited the Center as a model of innovation, and I was hoping you could elaborate on that tonight.

**DEAN D. GORDON SMITH:** I’m going to start with a story about Dean James (Jim) Rasband. When I became the dean, I felt overwhelmed by the position. I had been Jim’s associate dean for five years, and I thought I knew what was going on. When I was made dean, I realized he hadn’t been telling me a lot of things. At the time, people were wearing bracelets that said *wwJD?* [What would Jesus do?] Every time I’d be faced with a question, I would think, *What would Jim do?* and I tried to do that.

This connects to innovation. When I was a younger professor at University of Wisconsin Law School, I studied in an entrepreneurship group. One of my mentors was a sociologist who taught in the business school. Under her guidance, we became interested in exploring the question *How do people innovate?* She told us that some young companies would imagine what great companies would do, and then they would try to act on their conclusions. They weren’t copying what great companies were doing; instead, they would ask themselves: What would this great company do in our unique circumstance?

I remember thinking about that question when I was the dean. I wasn’t trying to be Jim Rasband because that wasn’t possible, and I wasn’t trying to imitate him. But considering what he would do was a way to think about what I should do in a given circumstance.

As most of you know, law schools get categorized as either regional or national law schools. I had an experience as the dean, in preparing some remarks, in which I realized that BYU has never been a regional law school. We’re not a national law school. We’re a global law school. As we started to think and talk about that, I

thought, *What would a global law school do?* And I kept coming back to the Center: What did the Center do? What did Cole do, what did Brett do to build the Center? How did that happen? I listened to their stories and tried to use those stories to fuel my imagination for the Law School as a whole, to think about what a law school of global influence would look like.

We already had a law school of global influence through the Center, so it wasn’t as if we were building from scratch. More recently we’ve seen expansion—with the help of Bill Atkin and others—of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, and of course we have Dean Moore, a global lawyer himself. We have continued this theme of global influence in various ways through the Law School.

So I see the Center as being the pathbreaker in creating a global law school. I count as one of the great honors of my life the time I sat in Cole’s office and he told me the story of the Center. I marveled at the story Dean Hansen referenced—about the Berlin Wall falling—because I happened to be in Europe when that was happening, and I could visualize Cole pondering about the influence he could have. To see what has happened since is a marvel to me.

**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** Dean Moore, of all the deans, you’re the one who has worn two hats, having been both a dean and an associate director of the Center, focused on Latin America and Africa. How have these dual roles helped you see different aspects of the Center, both within the Law School and beyond?

**DEAN DAVID H. MOORE:** I’m so grateful for the legacy of each of these deans and also for the support for BYU Law School by those in attendance tonight. As Elizabeth said, I have the privilege of being the current dean, and I was associate director at the Center before assuming this position. And from those perspectives, I want to make a bold statement—that the Center really could not exist or succeed without the Law School, and in a sense, the Law School could not succeed without the Center.

What do I mean by those statements? The International Center for Law and Religion Studies is the world’s leading academic center on religious freedom. I saw this as an associate director, going

out and witnessing the response of so many to the Center’s work, their impression of the Center and the impact it makes, and their reliance on the Center in their own efforts to promote religious freedom in countries around the world. You don’t become a leading academic institution without a leading academic home, and as has been mentioned, there’s a wonderful fit for the Center in the foundation the Law School provides.

But the Law School is also tied inextricably to the Center. The Law School’s mission statement says that “we seek to be and develop people of integrity who combine faith and intellect in lifelong service to God and neighbor.”<sup>4</sup> We are able to combine faith and intellect to create top-notch lawyers who are also committed disciples because of religious freedom. So we rely on the foundation that the Center is promoting and establishing around the world.

The two institutions also rely on each other in very practical ways. My dean of admissions has mentioned that as he reads applications and sees the reasons prospective students want to come to BYU Law School, he finds that a significant percentage of applicants want to be involved in the religious freedom work of the Center. And so the Center provides opportunities and vision. Even though very few of our students will be able to sustain a professional life in religious freedom, the Center provides opportunities to learn and to develop a vision and goals for life—a meaningful cause that students can remain involved in after graduating.

This is my own experience. Like Hannah and Elizabeth, I was a student who worked with Cole before there was a Center. As I was navigating my career path, I remember a time when I had to decide whether I would continue in practice or go an academic route. It was seeing Cole and the influence for good that an academic could have that led me to pursue an academic career. The Center’s influence on our students is widespread. It gives them a vision of what they can do with their law degrees.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** I have one more question for Dean Moore: Out of all the things the Center does, what do you see as the Center’s most important priorities? And how do you see those impacting the world?

DEAN DAVID H. MOORE

**THE CENTER REALLY COULD NOT EXIST  
OR SUCCEED WITHOUT THE LAW SCHOOL,  
AND IN A SENSE, THE LAW SCHOOL  
COULD NOT SUCCEED WITHOUT THE CENTER.**

# IF YOU ASK ME HOW THE CENTER HAS AFFECTED THE LAW SCHOOL'S MISSION, IT'S FRONT AND CENTER IN OUR MISSION STATEMENT.

**DEAN DAVID H. MOORE:** Two things that potentially have the most profound impact right now are the LLM program and the Oxford program that the Center supports. At its foundation, religious freedom is about people. It's about law, but it's people who get the laws in place, interpret them, enforce them, and advocate for them.

And so it's crucial to develop people around the world who are in a position to do that. Our LLM program does that. We invite incredible practicing attorneys from around the world who have compelling life experiences, and we give them an opportunity to learn about religious freedom while obtaining a degree that improves their career prospects and allows them to return to their countries as leaders—in the legal profession, in the Church, and in defending religious freedom. It develops this network of talented, prepared people to advance the cause of religious freedom.

The other is the Oxford program, where the Center brings rising academics from around the world and helps them learn how to teach law and religion and how to write an article in English for publication in a scholarly journal, which advances their professorial careers in incredible ways. And so, again, we create a network of leaders who are able to teach around the globe and cultivate the next generation of defenders of religious freedom in a way that the group at BYU can never do on its own.

**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** Dean Smith, while you were dean, the Law School's mission statement was expanded to include tenets such as "BYU Law recognizes the inherent dignity and equality of each individual," and "we are committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ and honor His many roles, including healer, mediator, counselor, peacemaker, advocate, lawgiver, and judge."<sup>5</sup> From your perspective, how does the Center fit within and help advance the mission of the Law School?

**DEAN D. GORDON SMITH:** I want to pay a quick tribute to my friend Brett Scharffs and tell him a story, which I don't think he knows, about how he changed my life. In 2018 the Center was instrumental in promulgating the Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere. I can still remember Brett introducing it to me and me reading it for the first time. I read in the preamble something that hit me so strongly: "Whereas the equal human dignity of everyone everywhere is the foundational principle of human rights and reminds us that every person is of value and is worthy of respect."<sup>6</sup>

I said to Brett, "This is such a core, basic teaching of the gospel—a core idea that we should be talking about more as we train lawyers." A little over a year later, we had to shutter the Law School because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I remember thinking about that preamble as we had to make decisions about running the Law School during that time.

Then, in the summer after COVID began, George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis. And we had a very divisive presidential election in the fall. It was a very difficult time in the Law School. And I kept saying these words: "Every person is of value and is worthy of respect."

Justin Collings, now BYU academic vice president, was one of my associate deans at the time. He drafted a memo around that theme at the time of COVID because we had to announce to students that we were moving to a pass/fail grading system. The idea of individual value, worth, and respect became a theme at the Law School. At least it was my theme as I repeated the words "every person is of value and is worthy of respect." I had never thought that hard about this principle before and had never experienced how hard it was to actualize in my life—to actually treat everyone as being of value and worthy of respect. I didn't always do it. But

I'm grateful for the Punta del Este Declaration because, for whatever reason, at that moment, being reminded of this principle had a significant impact on me.

Later, Dave Moore, Justin, and I were on the committee drafting the Law School's new mission statement. The very first line of that mission statement, after it makes reference to the university, is "BYU Law recognizes the inherent dignity and equality of each individual." That line is an allusion to the Punta del Este Declaration. So if you ask me how the Center has affected the Law School's mission, it's front and center in our mission statement.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** Elder Rasband, as a former law professor, dean, and BYU vice president and now a general authority, how do you see the Center affecting and positively impacting constituencies beyond the Law School?

**ELDER JAMES R. RASBAND:** Many of you in attendance have participated in the annual Symposium that occurs in October. How we look at things sometimes depends on the hat that we're wearing. I remember as dean having a consuming concern that we ensure every paper presented at the Symposium be academically strong. As a member of the Asia North Area presidency, I felt that any Mongolian delegate we could get to the Symposium would be such a blessing to the work in Mongolia. But then the Center would appropriately give us some pushback, saying, "Yes, but the person you want to invite can't come and present the high-quality paper that we need." That dialogue is necessary. I'm grateful that Cole and Brett have been able to navigate that line so well over time—to try to help the areas do what we want to do, which is find friends to open doors to the work of gathering Israel, but also to strive to be true to the academic mission of the Law School.

There are so many examples, multiplied over the years, of how the Center has helped the work of the Church. But I'll give just

one example that occurred in the Asia North Area and involved Elizabeth Clark.

Mongolia is a fairly difficult place for religious liberty; it's a large country geographically with only about 3.5 million people. And we were struggling. We had built a stake center but could not get the city of Ulaanbaatar to give us the necessary permits to use it; it sat unused and empty for a couple of years, and so we went to work with the area legal counsel, Ken Barrow.

At the same time, Elizabeth was trying to create an interfaith coalition of different religious groups who also were unable to get permits. I happened to be in Ulaanbaatar when Elizabeth came to present a paper on provisions in the Mongolian Basic Law with respect to law and religion. The audience was this interfaith group and a variety of academics from other institutions. You're thinking, *Just another paper in another setting.* But Elizabeth came and was part of this effort to create relationships.

Fast forward a little bit: Because we could not get the government to move, we finally filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, and we were allied with the Catholics, Buddhists, and Seventh-day Adventists who were also trying to get permits. Again, the Center was helpful to us, together with the area legal counsel, and we got a favorable result, allowing us to finally open the stake center we hadn't been able to use.

We had been praying and hoping for a temple in Mongolia but thinking, *If you can't get a permit to operate a stake center, how are you going to be able to operate the House of the Lord?* But we were able to get this building permitted, and soon thereafter President Russell M. Nelson felt it appropriate to announce the house of the Lord in Mongolia. The Center's work was just a part of that; so many contribute so much. But that's the work of the Center over and over—these small, sometimes large, efforts that make a significant difference in the kingdom.



**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** Dean Worthen, you’ve also had “inside” and “outside” perspectives, serving first as dean of the Law School and then as president of BYU for nine years. Could you comment on your experience as president and how that has affected your view of the Center?

**PRESIDENT KEVIN J. WORTHEN:** I’ll answer that, as several others have, in a rather personal way. At an institutional level, the Center serves as a ready-made example of how the university is doing something to change the world. It was always easy to find examples of the impact of the Center’s work that also illustrated the university’s impact.

As for what I learned personally, I traveled much more as the president than I did in any other position; a lot of that travel was international, which I hadn’t done before. I had wonderful opportunities, but I gained an appreciation for the personal toll that takes; it gets old in a hurry when you’re changing time zones and rushing from place to place. Before that, I don’t think I had fully appreciated the kind of sacrifice that is made by Center leaders.

More importantly—and several have alluded to it—I determined as president of the university that people and relationships really matter more than anything else. I saw that on a visit to Jordan: all the connections made with the judges who received their LLM degrees at BYU Law and people, including Supreme Court judges, who had attended the Symposium. To them, we were celebrities. And it wasn’t me, it was BYU. It was really the Center as much as anything. I saw the same thing in the United Kingdom with Parliament because of relationships created by the Center that opened doors for the university. That takes a lot of work as well; you don’t instantly become friends. I want to commend each of the associate directors, directors, and others who have traveled around the world creating those relationships.

My Cole Durham story came in the late 1990s, before the Center was created. I was serving and teaching in Chile when Cole asked me to attend a conference in Peru with him, ostensibly as an expert in Latin America because I spoke Spanish and Cole didn’t. What was remarkable to me was that after about two days, I did not need to explain anything about the culture because Cole had figured it out, but in an interesting way. We attended a series of meetings with smaller groups, including governmental officials and religious leaders. Over the course of two days, the people came to realize, first, how smart Cole was, and second, how he was transparent. He was without guile. He didn’t seem to have an agenda. They started saying, “This is a guy we’re interested in.”

They would ask, “How do you handle such-and-such situation?”

And Cole would say, “Well, some countries handle it this way; this is what the advantages are, and here are some of the challenges they’ve had. Other countries would handle it a different way, and here are some of the challenges and advantages of that approach.”

It didn’t happen at first, but after about two days, they would look at him and ask, “What would you do?”

And then Cole would have the opportunity to say, “Here’s what I think should happen.”

That question was asked with greater frequency, and then people would ask, “Whom should we contact next in our country?”

And Cole would say, “Wasn’t there so-and-so who’s in such-and-such position?”

And they’d remember, “Oh yes, let’s go talk to that person.”

By the time I was done, I realized the experience was mainly for my benefit so I could understand how you interact with people in a way that creates those relationships of trust.

That approach makes such a difference in the world, and it has continued with Brett and others as they’ve gone out to do the hard work. It’s work that reflects how the Savior would approach such issues. It’s a testimony to me that staying calm and focused does make a difference. People resonate with that. As you apply the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a consistent manner, it changes hearts and opens doors for the good things that the Lord needs to have happen in those areas. So again, thanks to those from the Center who provided that example to me on a personal level.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** I think it’s appropriate that we give the last word to Dean Hansen. You’ve been present for the Law School’s 50 years and the Center’s 25 years. What is your charge to us for the next 25 or 50 years?

**DEAN H. REESE HANSEN:** While I work on that idea of a charge, I want to say, as I said earlier, that without President Romney, there is no Law School. Without Cole, there is no Center. And without Louise, there is no Cole. Thank you, Louise, for your support of Cole and his work over the years. I also want to say to Brett Scharffs, who has fallen into the trap that Cole set, thanks for your willingness to soldier on in the work that Cole has heroically done for so very, very long.

In the audience are many who are essential to the Center. I’m not speaking about students, although I could. I’m talking about the group of financial supporters; the encouragers; the eyes, ears, feet, and hands of the Center in places around the world. The Center needs you and your good work because there is so much work to be done that Brett can’t do it alone. So we rely on you. And I want to thank all of you for your sacrifice and your willingness to serve the kingdom by lending your hand in helping the work of the Center.

Now the charge: I’ve been around a long time. I’ve seen a lot and wondered, like so many have, What is the purpose of the Law School? I mentioned that I am firmly of the view that at least one of the purposes for the Law School’s creation was to provide a home for the Center. But I’ve also been around long enough to

know that the Center, as great as it is, is not the end of the purposes of the Law School.

The Center happened in such a natural way; the Law School and Cole were in place and prepared to make a difference in the world when the Wall fell. And I believe there are purposes for the Law School’s creation that are still to be found. I don’t suggest spending your time making an itemized list of possible purposes, but I think the purposes for the Law School will find the Law School, like the world found Cole Durham.

So the charge to Brett and everyone at the Center is to work hard, do your best, keep your eyes open for natural opportunities, and be ready to pick up and go when those opportunities come. I love the Law School, I love the Center, and I love the Lord. And He is watching over the Law School, the Center, and each of us.

**HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH:** I feel that we should say amen to all that was said. We want to thank the deans for joining us this evening and thank you all for celebrating 25 years of the Center with us. We are blessed by our relationship with each of you and are grateful for the ways you have blessed the Center.

**ELIZABETH A. CLARK:** Thank you all for celebrating with us tonight.

## NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Opening Remarks,” address delivered on the first day of classes at J. Reuben Clark Law School, 27 August 1973, law-23-media-prod.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/Opening\_Remarks\_Dallin\_H\_Oaks\_1973\_ce84ee99d4.pdf.
2. See Kevin J. Worthen, “A Graduate Program of Real Consequence: The Role of the Law School at BYU,” J. Reuben Clark Law School Founders Day address, 1 September 2016, speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen/graduate-program-real-consequence. See also “The Why of the Y,” Brigham Young University annual university conference address, 26 August 2014, speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen/y-2.
3. Oaks, “Opening Remarks.”
4. BYU Law Mission Statement, law.byu.edu/explore/byu-law-mission-statement.
5. BYU Law Mission Statement.
6. The Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, December 2018, dignityforeveryone.org/languages.



<b>DAVID H. MOORE</b>	<b>HANNAH CLAYSON SMITH</b>	<b>D. GORDON SMITH</b>	<b>JAMES R. RASBAND</b>
<b>BRETT G. SCHARFFS</b>	<b>KEVIN J. WORTHEN</b>	<b>H. REESE HANSEN</b>	<b>ELIZABETH A. CLARK</b>

# BY THE NUMBERS

627

## Scholarly Publications

627 law and religion-related publications since 1980

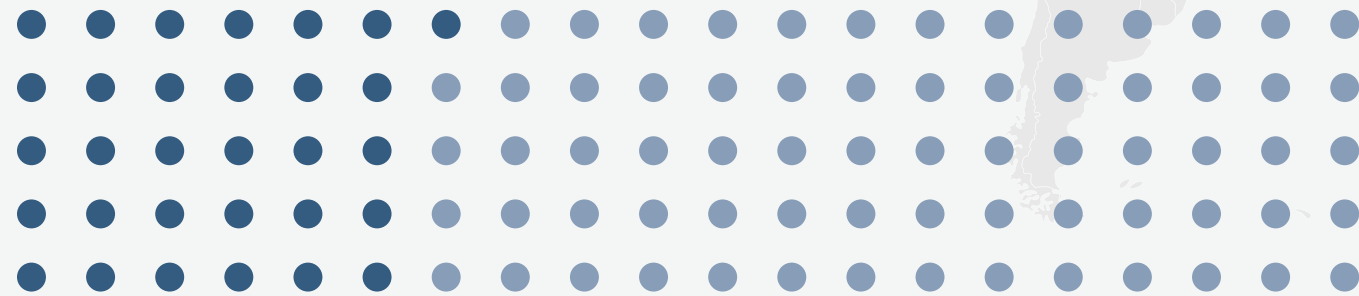
9

Countries

## Educational Programs

9 countries are home to law-and-religion education programs.

## Student Involvement



311

Summer Research Fellows

686

Symposium Executive Committee Members

+ Countless Volunteers

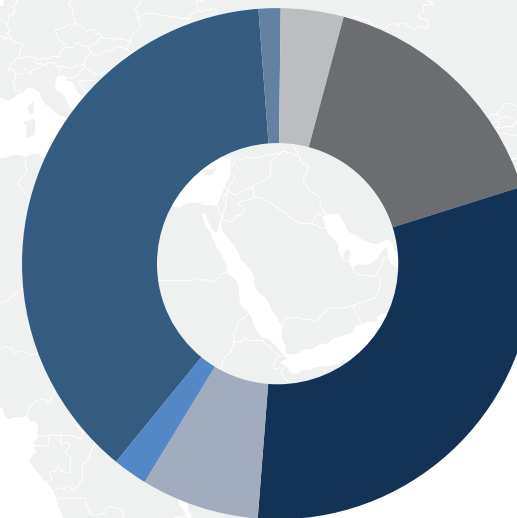
## Scholarly Events

1,275

**Total Events**  
1,275 different scholarly events since 2000

95 Countries  
137 Online Events

## 1,138 In-Country Events



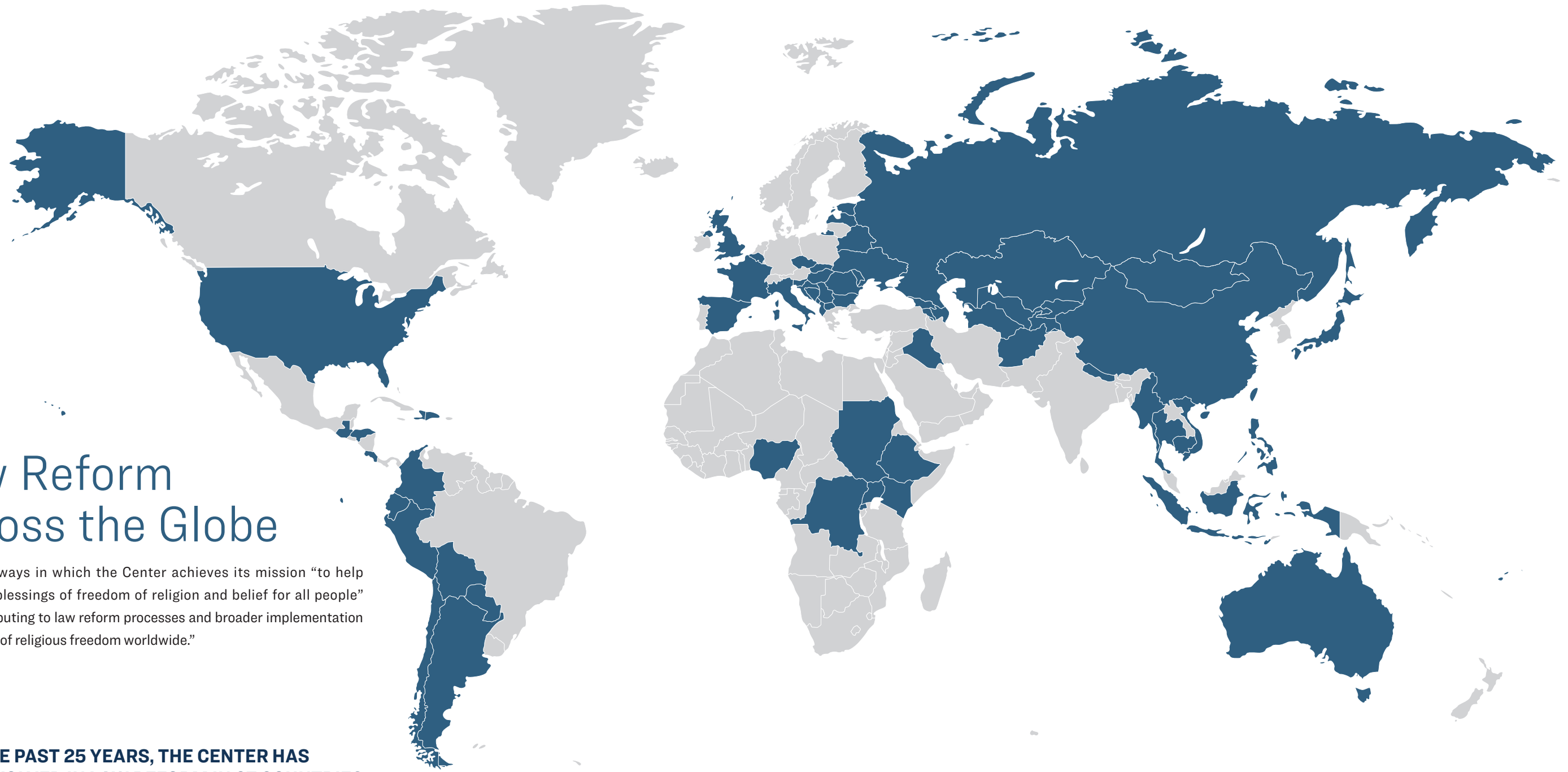
- Africa 46
- Asia 183
  - Central Asia 25
  - China 36
  - India 12
- Europe 355
  - Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union 142
- Latin America 85
- Middle East 25
- North America 431
- Pacific 13

## Law Reform

67<sup>25+ Years</sup>  
Countries

## Law and Religion Symposium

32<sup>1,561 Delegates</sup>  
145 Countries  
Years



# Law Reform Across the Globe

One of the ways in which the Center achieves its mission “to help secure the blessings of freedom of religion and belief for all people” is by “contributing to law reform processes and broader implementation of principles of religious freedom worldwide.”

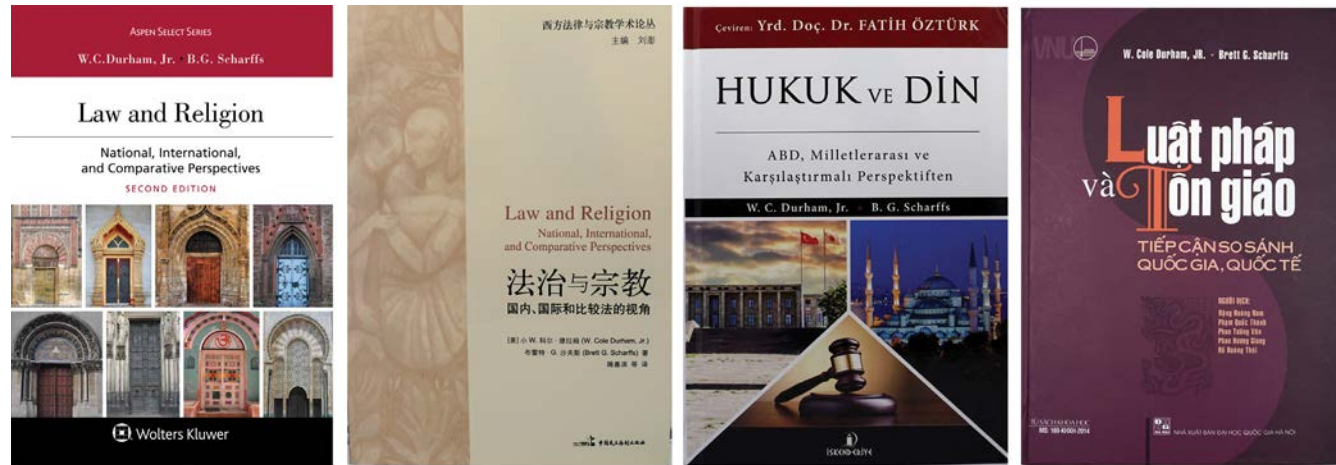
**OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, THE CENTER HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN LAW REFORM IN 67 COUNTRIES.**

- |                        |                                   |                    |            |                 |            |                |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|----------------|
| Afghanistan            | Bulgaria                          | Dominican Republic | Hungary    | Mongolia        | Russia     | Turkmenistan   |
| Albania                | Cambodia                          | Ecuador            | Indonesia  | Montenegro      | Rwanda     | Uganda         |
| Argentina              | Chile                             | Estonia            | Iraq       | Myanmar         | Samoa      | Ukraine        |
| Armenia                | China                             | Ethiopia           | Italy      | Nepal           | Serbia     | United Kingdom |
| Australia              | Colombia                          | Fiji               | Japan      | Nigeria         | Slovakia   | United States  |
| Azerbaijan             | Congo, Democratic Republic of the | France             | Kazakhstan | North Macedonia | Slovenia   | Uzbekistan     |
| Belarus                | Cook Islands                      | Georgia            | Kenya      | Paraguay        | Spain      | Vietnam        |
| Belgium                | Costa Rica                        | Guatemala          | Kyrgyzstan | Peru            | Sudan      |                |
| Bolivia                | Croatia                           | Haiti              | Latvia     | Philippines     | Tajikistan |                |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Czech Republic                    | Honduras           | Moldova    | Romania         | Thailand   |                |

# DRIVING CHANGE

## A Sampling of Impactful ICLRS Projects

Since its founding, the International Center for Law and Religion Studies has been a pioneer in the fields of religious-freedom scholarship and training in religious-freedom advocacy. The four projects highlighted here represent the Center's substantial contributions to protecting human dignity and securing freedom of religion and belief for everyone everywhere.



### THE CASEBOOK

In 2009, ICLRS Founding Director W. Cole Durham, Jr., and current Director Brett G. Scharffs published the first edition of *Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives*. This groundbreaking casebook filled a need for a comprehensive law and religion curriculum in us law schools. It immediately found an international audience as well, with first edition translations in Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish, and Burmese.

A second edition of the Casebook was published in 2019; translations will soon be published in Spanish, Hebrew, and Russian, and a Portuguese translation is in progress.

The Casebook's third edition, forthcoming in 2026, will feature major revisions and expansions in both the topics and jurisdictions addressed. Joining Durham and Scharffs as coauthor is longtime ICLRS associate Renáta Uitz, professor of law and government at Royal Holloway, University of London, and senior research fellow at Central European University's Democracy Institute. Holly Hinckley Lesan is the Casebook's coordinating editor.

The Casebook comprises a dynamic combination of international and us materials that are designed to stimulate discussion of familiar, emerging, and sensitive issues of conflict and debate in a global context. Its editions have offered new paradigms for studying law and religion in response to the forces of globalization, an increasingly international focus on religion, and religious freedom issues addressed by the European Court of Human Rights and other regional and national courts. These international factors, in turn, shed new light on law and religion issues in the United States and distinctive features of the us legal system.

To explicate such extensive and dynamic subject matter beyond the limitations of a single volume, the Casebook authors and editor have produced a web supplement with additional resources, including teaching modules and "country threads" featuring national, cultural, and language-specific content and perspectives.



### LATIN AMERICAN CONSORTIUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

At the Congress on Religious Freedom held 22 September 2000 at the law school of Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, the Latin American Consortium for Religious Freedom (CLLR) was established. Over the last 25 years, the Consortium has worked closely with the Center on various events throughout Latin America.

According to the Consortium's website, "the general purpose of the Consortium is to establish a permanent forum for reflection, research, and promotion of the right to religious freedom, the legal regulation of religious phenomena, and the legal relationships that should exist between religious denominations and the states." Members of the Consortium engage in research, law

reform, publishing, and networking between religious freedom scholars and policymakers.

Over the last 25 years, the Center has been involved in the founding, organization, and support of multiple consortiums for law and religion studies. These include the International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ICLARS) founded in 2007, the African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) founded in 2014, the West African Regional Center for Law and Religion Studies (WARCLARS) founded in 2015, and the South Asia Consortium for Religion and Law Studies (SACRALs) founded in 2017.





## YOUNG SCHOLARS FELLOWSHIP ON RELIGION AND THE RULE OF LAW

Recognizing the crucial need for leaders who can contribute scholarship to the field of law and religion, advise governments on law reform, and continue to grow ICLRS networks worldwide, the Center launched the Young Scholars Fellowship on Religion and the Rule of Law in 2018. This advanced-certificate training program, hosted annually at Christ Church, University of Oxford, has provided in-depth training on law and religion to 91 scholars from 46 countries to date.<sup>1</sup> Program alumni include university faculty, advanced PhD students, judges, government officials, and policy advisors from countries facing various religious freedom challenges.

The Young Scholars program features two components. First, participants learn how to examine law-and-religion-related issues from various perspectives, with coursework based on the groundbreaking casebook *Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives* by W. Cole Durham, Jr., and Brett G. Scharffs. Casebook instructors are drawn from a pool of senior scholars who participate in ICLRS-sponsored academic conferences held concurrently with the Young Scholars program. The variety of instructors—coming from different countries and having different areas of expertise—exposes Young Scholars to diverse teaching methods and perspectives, which inform their future teaching, research, writing, law-making, and advising.

Second, participants engage in one-on-one writing tutorials with experienced legal writing instructors who help them prepare an article on law and religion for publication in an English-language academic journal. Writing tutors continue working with many Young Scholars beyond the program's three weeks to help participants accomplish their publishing goals.

Young Scholars also spend one day in London meeting with dignitaries involved in advancing and upholding religious freedom protections, such as Lord Hodge, deputy president of the UK Supreme Court; Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox archbishop of London; members of Parliament; and leaders of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FORB).

Participants leave Oxford with a broader and deeper understanding of international freedom of religion or belief; an improved article draft in progress; an international network of friends and scholars; and a commitment to continue collaborating with each other, guest instructors, and the Center. Program alumni have published numerous articles, collaborated on and published a book, planned academic panels and conferences together, and returned as guest instructors to teach other Young Scholars cohorts. They continue collaborating with the Center in significant ways, including authoring blog posts and book chapters, coauthoring books, cosponsoring conferences, and presenting at regional conferences and the annual ICLRS Symposium. Several have translated the Casebook into their native languages for use in classrooms across the world. Alumni consistently report that the Young Scholars program is one of the most valuable and impactful experiences of their personal and professional lives, increasing their capacity to work and lead effectively in their spheres of influence.

As we look back on six years of the Young Scholars program, we are grateful for alumni who continue to magnify the Center's impact and reputation. Their accomplishments are a testament to the importance of training the next generation of thought leaders who will maximize the right to freedom of religion or belief for all.

### NOTE

1. The Young Scholars program began in 2018 and has run annually, with the exception of 2020 and 2021, when it was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## 20 YEARS OF TRAINING IN VIETNAM

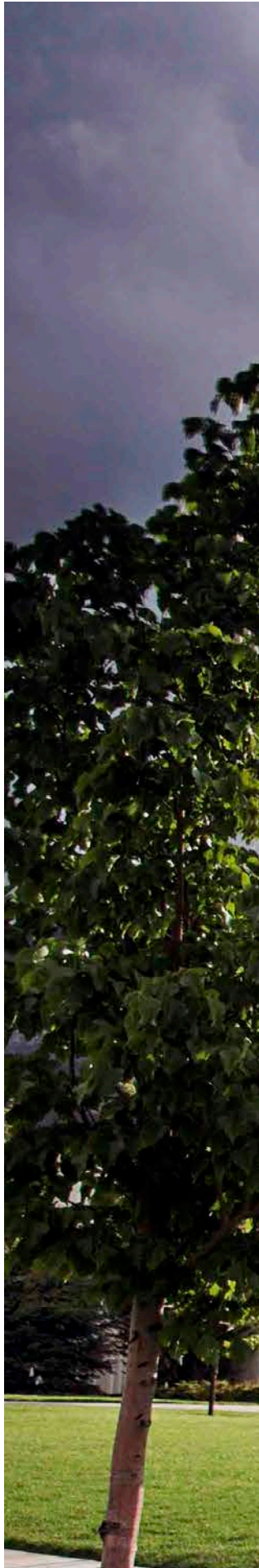
The year 2025 marked not only the 25th anniversary of the Center's founding but also the 20th year of the Center's work in Vietnam.

For two decades, the Center and its long-term partner, the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), have organized the Vietnam Certificate and Rule of Law Training. Working with local government and religious leaders in Vietnam, ICLRS and IGE have brought together policymakers, faith leaders, civil society actors, and academics to discuss the intersection of law and religion from an international and comparative law perspective.

The most recent training took place 11-12 March 2025 at Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics in Hanoi. Representatives from the Center and IGE were joined by 80 participants from

Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States, and Vietnam. The conference was cohosted by the Institute of Ethnicity and Religion at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and the Vietnam-USA Society at the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations. Discussions were structured around three key frameworks: religion and the rule of law, religion and human dignity, and cross-cultural religious literacy.

While the Vietnam Certificate and Rule of Law Training is the longest consecutive running course, the Center has also conducted training in many other parts of the world, including China, Hungary, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, the UK, and Uzbekistan.



## OUR MISSION

It is the mission of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University to help secure the blessings of freedom of religion and belief for all people by

Expanding, deepening, and disseminating knowledge and expertise regarding the interrelationship of law and religion;

Facilitating the growth of networks of scholars, experts, and policymakers involved in the field of religion and law;

Contributing to law reform processes and broader implementation of principles of religious freedom worldwide.





Support the Center by emailing [INFO@ICLRS.ORG](mailto:INFO@ICLRS.ORG).