

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS  
AVE MARIA SCHOOL OF LAW  
MAY 13, 2007

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Happy Mother's Day to my mom and to all of our mothers here who, with our dads, were vital in our reaching this day. And, of course, our sincere gratitude to the husbands, wives, and children of the graduates for their constant love and support.

Honorable Judge Janice Rogers Brown, Mr. Monaghan, Members of the Board of Governors, Dean Dobranski, our distinguished faculty and administration, family and friends, and the Class of 2007:

In the inaugural issue of the *Ave Maria Law Review* in 2003, one of the contributors wrote:

It will surprise no one that a necessary precondition to membership in the law professoriate is the conviction that students are wrong on just about everything. That said, however, I think the students who chose Ave Maria over other law school options were right: there is indeed something special about this new experiment in legal education.<sup>1</sup>

And today, before you, these graduates are living proof of the success of this new experiment in legal education. Ave Maria sends forth into the world 123 lawyers who have, for the last three years, been exploring law in ways no other law students were able. We engaged not only in the study of the rule of law, but we were challenged to understand the intellectual, philosophical, and moral foundations that

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<sup>†</sup> Juris Doctor, Ave Maria School of Law, 2007. I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support during my years in law school, and in particular for their help and insight in preparing this speech. A special thank you to my professors for providing me with a truly outstanding legal education and a wonderful law school experience. And finally, my dear classmates, thank you for entrusting me with the honor of speaking on your behalf. It was truly a privilege to be able to represent such a remarkable group of individuals. May our Lord keep you close to His most Sacred Heart.

1. Stephen F. Smith, *Cultural Change and "Catholic Lawyers,"* 1 AVE MARIA L. REV. 31, 34 (2003).

are intimately connected to any legal system. We were challenged as well to strive for our full potential in an educational atmosphere that prides itself on educating the whole person. We graduate having received the training necessary to be lawyers of professional distinction, possessing not only the finest legal research and writing skills and knowledge about civil procedure minimum contacts but, unlike many of our legal counterparts, also being grounded in traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice. And more importantly, this school has succeeded because we have grown into a community under *Fides et Ratio*.<sup>2</sup> Community is what shapes us, and here at Ave Maria we have been shaped in a community of faith and reason, and also of love. This community provided an academically rigorous environment in the Catholic intellectual tradition where we were constantly challenged, both academically and spiritually, and simultaneously loved. We were loved because we were surrounded by people who understand what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God.

My dear classmates, having experienced three years of intense study and numerous moments of frustration, anxiety, and stress, today we celebrate the fruits of our labor. Aren't we singularly blessed, that during these years we have been part of a community, although certainly not perfect, but better than anywhere else? We all share a special closeness that arises not only out of our common bond of surviving law school together, but the fact that we have become a community, a family, and have flourished! Many of our classmates found their husbands and wives here: Jerry and Cristy; Adele and JJ; Katie and Augie; John and Erin; Heather and Mitch; Erin and Will; Brian and Nicole; Tom and Diamond; Laura and Dan; and Andrew and Olesia. Others had their babies baptized in our very own chapel, with fellow classmates in attendance, and celebrations afterwards for our community to share in—truly an experience unfathomed elsewhere. We have classmates who became Catholic during our time here, and often were sponsored by fellow classmates. We celebrated our classmates' children's birthdays, played with them, and babysat them. We shared our class outlines with each other, always desiring our fellow classmates' achievements, along with our own. We spent many a night on the deck at the Joes' house or playing lawball at JJ

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2. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* [Encyclical Letter on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason] (1998).

and Jason's. We engaged in philosophical discussions in the hallways, in our homes, and yes, out at the bars, discussions that may only be engaged in when you share the same basic foundations of thought. And we loved each other. And we have emerged as lawyers, lawyers who are equipped with the knowledge we need to go out into the world and transform it. Indeed, isn't that the reason many of us came to Ave Maria in the first place—to go to a different kind of school to become a different kind of lawyer? And today we successfully emerge as that different kind of lawyer.

This success that these graduates represent is worth all the efforts that so many have made: Mr. Monaghan, Dean Dobranski, the founding faculty, new faculty and administration, and financial supporters. We leave with the sincere hope that those who remain will spare no effort to continue to build this community, which has been such a blessing and so worthwhile. Everyone here has a contribution to make to this community's growth. We all have experienced the truth of the old Irish proverb: "No good deed goes unpunished." Well, no good institution or community goes unpunished. No institution or community that is confronting evil in our society will go unpunished, unchallenged. And the challenges to individuals can be very painful due to injustices being perpetrated. We can see the wisdom of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta when she prayed: "Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience."<sup>3</sup> We all have a critical role to play in this noble undertaking. And if those who have suffered the most will still work for the good of this community, then their contribution will be the greatest of all. And they have an endless source of help in our Patroness, the Blessed Mother. In an Apostolic Constitution issued by Pope Pius IX, he wrote:

[F]ly with utter confidence to this most sweet Mother of mercy and grace in all dangers, difficulties, needs, doubts and fears. Under her guidance, under her patronage, under her kindness and protection, nothing is to be feared; nothing is hopeless. Because, while bearing toward us a truly motherly affection and having in her care the work of our salvation, she is solicitous about the whole human race. . . .

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3. MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, *SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD: MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA* 75 (1971).

[S]he presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard.<sup>4</sup>

So it is my prayer today that every member of the law school renews his or her commitment to continue to build this community, a community that seven years ago we entrusted to our Blessed Mother.

And to my dear classmates, it is my prayer that we will heed the words of St. Luke's Gospel, that to whom much is given, much is expected.<sup>5</sup> Christ expects those endowed with a gift to cultivate that gift, and to use it in service to Him and to humanity. We leave here today equipped to be beacons in the darkness. We leave here today with the intellectual prowess, the courage of conviction, and the tool—a law degree—to make a difference in the world for the greater glory of God. It is now our responsibility, and not only a responsibility but also a privilege, to be a witness in our lives to the training, expertise, values, and love that we have received here at Ave Maria.

So, graduates of 2007, make our Patroness proud and show the culture just what it means to be a graduate of Ave Maria School of Law.

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4. Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* [*Apostolic Constitution Defining the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*] ¶ 22 (1854).

5. *Luke* 12:48.