

Michael Canady

Sycamore Breakfast Speech 2025

Thank you Mr. Dempsey, thank you Fr. Miscamble and Mr. Bopp for your remarks, and thank you to all of you for being here. It's an honor to address so many people whom I have learned from during the past year as editor of the *Irish Rover*, and even during the past three years at Notre Dame. So now is my chance to thank all of you for coming, and especially the professors, priests, former editors, and friends whom I've learned from. I've grown so much in my faith, in friendships, and intellectually during my time here, and I owe so much of my formation at Notre Dame to many of the people in this room today.

The theme of this event is quite unique: a defamation lawsuit filed by a university professor, against a Catholic student newspaper. But it encapsulates well the mission of the *Rover*: standing up for truth, despite the costs.

You might call it a character flaw, but I've always been drawn to controversy. In my senior year of high school, before coming to Notre Dame, I read a forceful, honest, and professionally written article in the *Rover*, attacking Notre Dame's embrace of the LGBTQ agenda—perhaps you've read it, “No Man can Serve Two Masters,” by then editor-in-chief, Mary Frances Myler. But more than just agreeing with the arguments in the article, I heard about some of the hate she was receiving on campus, simply for standing up for the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage, sexuality, and gender. And it was then—in my senior year of high school—that I knew I wanted to get involved in the *Rover*. When I got on campus, I immediately joined the staff writer email list, and I wrote my first article a month into school. It was pretty bad, and though I know you all read it at the time, I'll forgive you if you forgot about it, because of the recent focus on a different article that was published in the same issue: a little known piece about a university professor named Tamara Kay, advocating for abortion, written by a different editor in chief Joseph Dereuil. Next thing you know,

here we are at a Sycamore Trust breakfast about a lawsuit on that article. I will say, I wasn't harmed by the lawsuit; it didn't involve me directly; it was before my time. But I can personally attest that the example of my friends who stood firm—who would not be silenced—was influential in my own personal development. I wanted to be part of a community and an institution that would stand up for truth and speak it plainly, without hiding behind platitudes and fear. And as I said earlier, that example is emblematic of the *Rover's* broader mission: defending our beloved university against very real attacks against the Catholic character, very real attacks brought by very real people. In my opening letter as editor-in-chief, I said just that: Notre Dame is a battleground. She is under attack, from without and from within.

But the saying is true, bad things happen when good people do nothing. The lawsuit taught us a lot, but it also illuminated which side people fell on in the battle for the soul of Notre Dame. As a conservative student newspaper, the *Rover* certainly gets its fair share of criticism from the left. But you might be surprised to hear that many of our critics—and critics of Sycamore Trust as well—would actually identify as “conservative” themselves. They say that they agree with us much of the time, but that we're too “harsh”; we need to “emphasize the positives more”; and that “these issues can be resolved privately, without publicity.” And admittedly, we can be direct at times. But our reporting has never been sensationalist just for the sake of clicks, and we try to alert administrators to give them plenty of time to sort things out behind the scenes.

But in these matters of Catholic doctrine at a Catholic university, these critics miss the point: directness is what is needed. These things *shouldn't* be handled privately and slowly; they should be handled with decisiveness and clarity by the university administration. For example, when a professor at the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., invited a self-described abortion doula to speak on campus in 2024, the President—a former Notre Dame dean—didn't dodge his responsibilities, citing a vague notion of “academic freedom.” He announced not only that

the “doula” was no longer welcome to speak on the university’s campus, but also that the professor who hosted the event had been fired.

Notre Dame is still Catholic, but the disease she suffers from is *not* unbridled wokeness or overwhelming leftism. It is indecision—she is teetering between a commitment to the truth, and a deference to secularism.

The stakes could not be higher, and the other side realizes this. They do not hide behind qualms of indecision and fear of punishment. They speak their views unabashedly. And yet how many authentically Catholic professors and administrators can you find that will still speak, in the open, the truth about abortion, about gender ideology, about DEI? You can find some, but that number is dwindling, and it’s dwindling fast.

At one point in the year, I was receiving pushback from thousands of students online, about an editorial I wrote criticizing Notre Dame’s obsession with “belonging” rather than formation in a culture of truth. Someone asked me why we don’t just use pseudonyms for our articles to avoid the controversy that comes from putting your name out in public. But immediately, I rejected the idea, because this is a core aspect of the formation in the *Rover*: to speak the truth, and to receive the consequences for it. I’ll be honest: I don’t think any other student group or campus organization is willing to speak the truth as clearly. And granted, it’s not the role of each club to be as bold as the *Rover*. But the *Rover* does serve this integral role in the university, as the conscience of the university, the foremost defender of Catholicism on campus, and in this fight, as an institution that forms its writers and staff to pursue the truth.

In the past few years alone, editors have gone on to politics, journalism, teaching and religious life—the real movers and shakers of society, not just Lockheed Martin, DeLoitte, and Goldman Sachs (well, maybe it’s also because they just won’t hire us). Notre Dame promises to form the whole person, and it does so well in many areas. But the *Rover* fills in the gaps. We provide the

formation that the university is not yet ready to provide—the courage to stand up for the difficult truths of the Catholic faith. In this effort, we host speakers, journalism workshops, student leader summits, and community events where some staff even meet their future spouses. Our coverage in the last decade has received national coverage, in both its positive and negative reflections of the university. These include the university's awards given to Presidents Obama and Biden, the turn towards gender ideology, the drag show, and the administration's growing DEI apparatus. But more often, our reporting has also included positive trends: a student poll on the U.S. Presidential Election that narrowly favored Trump; the huge numbers of conversions to Catholicism at Notre Dame and across the country; and the vast resources that so many campus clubs and organizations offer—the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture, the Center for Citizenship and Constitutional Government, and the Business Honors Program, just to name a few. And more than just promotion, the *Rover* itself attempts to articulate a positive vision of what the university should be; and the *Rover* teaches students how they should think about issues of culture, politics, and religion at a Catholic university, how they should critique aspects of their university—how, ultimately, to love Our Lady's University. Love that is much more than superficial nostalgia for their time spent here, but love born from truth, love that is patient but firm, stemming from love for Our Lady, Notre Dame, and her son.

The late great philosopher and Notre Dame professor Alisdair MacIntyre, who passed away just last week, wrote about the disintegration of the basic moral framework of society, and the need to rebuild it. Notre Dame's own Catholic character hasn't crumbled entirely, but the *Rover* serves as the scaffolding to uphold and rebuild that framework that is necessary for a flourishing community.

And whenever I talk to Catholic students who are considering attending Notre Dame, I want to be clear: I say, undoubtedly, yes. Notre Dame is the best place to go, if you're up for it. I love this institution with all my heart. But come ready to fight. And the fight will form you into more than just good people in society, who care about the values of democracy, sustainability, and poverty. It

will form you into more than just a vague “force for good” in the world. Notre Dame is a battleground, but on that battleground, you will become a defender of the truth, no matter the cost. May Our Lady, Queen of Notre Dame and patroness of the *Irish Rover*, pray for us. Thank you.