

# VIEWPOINT

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## THE OBSERVER

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### ■ AND IN THIS CORNER

## Defining the Catholic and apostolic university

Is the University of Notre Dame du Lac a Catholic university?

This may seem like a rather inane question, yet it is one that has been raised in the not-so-distant past. If you asked anyone at Notre Dame whether or not it was a "Catholic university," 99 and 44/100ths of them would respond with an incredulous look or a snide smirk at the questioner's lack of intelligence.

### Matthew Apple

The above question naturally assumes the listener knows the meaning of the word "Catholic." According to modern connotation, "Catholic" denotes a person or a concept which adheres to a system of beliefs espoused by a Christian sect based in Rome, Italy, known throughout Western History as "The Church."

It is to this definition that most refer when describing Notre Dame as "Catholic" — that it embodies the beliefs and traditions one normally associates with the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet Notre Dame and many other American "Catholic universities" do not subscribe to official Church dogma concerning academia.

A recent observation that Notre Dame does not discriminate by hiring a majority of new faculty members based solely on their religious beliefs may or may not be true — this writer honestly does not know.

The observation apparently implies that Notre Dame, claiming allegiance to Catholic beliefs, has somehow rebelled against the Church by hiring infidels and non-Catholic Christians as teachers.

Does this really constitute a "secular-

ization" on the part of Notre Dame? Everything Notre Dame does as an institution is based upon the moral principles of the Catholic Church.

Every rule in "du Lac" reflects the influence of a Catholic standard of personal moral conduct, and, whether or not one chooses to agree with aspects of these rules, one must agree that the University maintains a consistent system of beliefs commonly called "Christian."

Does the hiring of many "non-believers" by Notre Dame constitute a divergence from its moral standards? Does Notre Dame's recognition that the Catholic Church is not the single standard of ethnicity and religiosity constitute a "breach of faith"?

Does the fact that the student and faculty population is rapidly becoming more diverse mean that Notre Dame is somehow morally "degenerating" and will soon turn into "another Vanderbilt"?

Surely this question is even more facetious than the former inanity concerning Notre Dame's "Catholic" nature. Perhaps what is needed here is a different definition of the word "Catholic."

According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, the word "catholic" also means "universal." When the Church was founded, since it had all but eliminated other versions of Christianity at the time, it was indeed the embodiment of a "universal" Christian religion in Europe.

Over time, this universality has been replaced by a rigid dogma and a hierarchy which has alienated entire countries with its refusal to consider alternative views of the world.

It is this kind of authoritarian rigidity which has led to such comical beliefs as recently expressed by a man of the cloth, that students of Notre Dame who move outside the confines of campus do so in order to sell pornography and candy bars to impoverished local youths. Surely, this is not what Notre Dame seeks to represent.

In recent years Notre Dame has



sought to increase its funding in science and the arts to become a respectable research institute, to regain its academic standing among American institutes of higher learning.

Evidently, the University realizes that to seclude itself from the variety of human ethnicity and belief systems is to announce its self-imposed demise to the educated world.

American Catholic universities are actively supporting a larger world view and accepting a greater moral responsibility to assist in improving human relations and in crossing religious and cultural backgrounds, to help people recognize the common moral themes of all systems of belief. And the distant Church hierarchy sees this only as a denial of faith.

Perhaps Notre Dame and other American universities have chosen to reject the old, party-line dogma of a "One True Faith" which seeks to dominate and to control and makes enemies of friends.

Perhaps Notre Dame has chosen to follow not an artificial and vindictive hierarchy of beliefs but a vision of a true underlying belief which has been pur-

posely obscured by invention and circumstance.

Change is difficult. It may be that the older generation of Catholics, subscribers to a by-gone age of cultural and religious division, are afraid to accept a new vision of humanity. It may be that they are fearful of discovering that through these many years they have been mistaken, that one does not need to control fellow community members to live in peace.

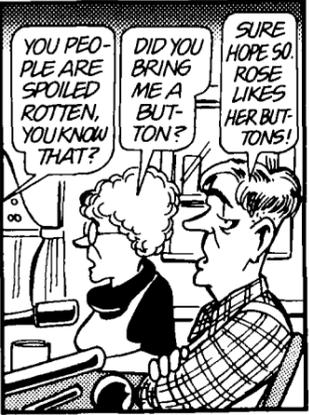
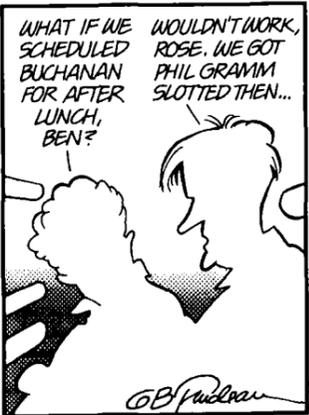
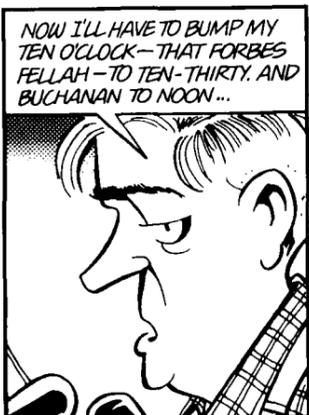
I do not believe that Notre Dame's "Catholic character" will fade overnight into a seething mass of sinful secular debauchery. I do believe that it may with time develop into a truly catholic character, a character which will transcend religious and ethnic boundaries imposed by a divided and hateful society.

It is not the dogma and artificial order of Catholicism that will elevate Notre Dame to a higher academic and moral stature; it is the belief in the only true rule of Christianity, "Love thy neighbor."

Matthew Apple is a creative writing graduate student at Notre Dame. He can be reached at [matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu](mailto:matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu).

### ■ DOONESBURY

GARRY TRUDEAU



### ■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Let all the learned say what they can, 'tis ready money makes the man."

—William Somerville