

## **Letter to the editor: *Did we regild her only to ridicule her?***

By: Madelyn Stout and Merlot Fogarty

In the weeks following the completion of the regilding of the dome and Our Lady, promotional posters have appeared throughout campus advertising a drag show on November 3. Months were spent regilding her, accentuating the beauty and truth of her feminine form in *imago dei*. A feminine form that is warped and mocked in the burlesque-styled form of entertainment that drag ultimately is. We cannot help but question how witnessing such a performance prepares students to be [forces for good](#) and truth in the world.

This is not a club-sponsored event. This is not a course-sponsored event. The Departments of Film, Television, and Theater, Music, and American Studies, the College of Arts and Letters Initiative on Race and Resilience, the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, and the Gender Studies Program are all sponsoring this event.

And it's being tolerated under the guise of 'academic freedom.'

In an email to Father Gerry Olinger, the Vice President of Student Affairs, several students expressed concern that University funding will be paying drag 'artists' to come to Notre Dame, dress as women, defile femininity, and most importantly, promote the disordered ideology that gender and sexuality are fluid – in direct contradiction to [Church teaching](#).

His response cited President Father John Jenkins' February [statement](#) on Freedom of Expression: "Because Notre Dame is a university committed to the pursuit of truth through teaching, learning, inquiry, and dialogue, we are committed fully to the academic freedom of scholars to research and publish the results of their research and to teach in accord with their obligations and training."

Olinger continued: "This freedom in academic contexts is critical, and the University protects this freedom even when the content of the presentation is objectionable to some or even many. Because the event you reference is part of a one-credit course in Film, Television and Theater on the History of Drag, the principle of academic freedom does apply in this instance."

The course Olinger references is Professor Pamela Wojcik's one-credit class "What a Drag: Drag on Screen—Variations and Meanings," offered through the Film, Television, and Theater program. The drag performance posters, however, make no mention of this course and its supposed relation to the event.

While the university [once again](#) attempts to hide its attack of truth under the veil of academic freedom, the same statement cited by Olinger *also states* that “The right of free expression does not, of course, extend to speech that threatens violence or constitutes harassment against an individual or a group. Such expressions violate University policies and will not be tolerated.”

A drag show absolutely constitutes the harassment of women. In drag across the country, biological males dress in provocative women’s clothing and portray [sexual violence](#) for the [sake of entertainment](#). No where else in our nation do we accept misogynistic sexual stereotyping and objectification as something to be celebrated.

This event is not for the sake of study or dialogue; it is not the result of a faculty or students’ research; it is not for the sake of academic inquiry. Three male ‘artists’ are being paid to parade around in provocative women’s clothing under the guise of ‘self-expression’ and ‘bodily autonomy.’ If this is academic freedom, then the phrase is meaningless. Academic freedom should not be used as a weapon of opinionized activism.

*Notre Dame*, Our Lady, the Mother of God: she is the very essence of the spirituality, femininity, and motherhood that women of faith aspire to – and yet, the university refuses to protect such an image. To hide under the veil of academic freedom is no better than lying in wait within the garden doors [to leer upon Susanna](#). Who is to protect women from such lustful gazes? To refuse to protect the beauty, sanctity, and dignity of the women of this university is to refuse to protect the woman who sits upon our dome.

Women have been at Notre Dame now for fifty years. The leaps made in the opportunities available to us are immense. Yet, we’re told to remain silent while femininity is publicly degraded by men who believe that womanhood can be reduced to exaggerated makeup, provocative clothing, and erotic dance.

Women [are](#) harassed, objectified, and mocked through events at a university that [claims](#) to be dedicated to the pursuit of truth and protection of human dignity. The line has been crossed. Enough is enough.

Our very identity is being ridiculed under Mary’s watchful eye.

The university’s moral obligation to the truth and protection of her students absolutely overrides a shallow notion of ‘academic freedom’ masking activist falsehood. We cannot stand for the normalization of disordered ideology. We cannot stand for the pursuit of false ideas of the human person. And we certainly cannot stand for the persistent

ridiculing of women and violation of our dignity. Prejudice against the truth of the human body should have no place here, especially at a university under the patronage of Mary, Mother of God.

Students, faculty, alumni, and parents must speak out. To send an email to a university administrator, do so through [nodragnd.org](mailto:info@nodragnd.org).