

# CATHOLIC PROFESSOR WINS JOB BACK

Recently, an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois, Ken Howell, has been on a roller coaster ride regarding his employment at the school. Howell, who teaches courses on Catholicism, was fired for explaining in an e-mail that homosexuality violates Catholic natural law teachings. A few weeks later, after being hung out to dry by various organizations and media outlets, the University extended an invitation back to him saying that he could teach this fall.

When we first heard of this story, we said that the University of Illinois should be sued, and that we would make sure that Professor Howell had everything he needed to successfully challenge the school. When we contacted Professor Howell, he informed us that he was working with the Alliance Defense Fund in fighting the school. We knew that he was in good hands.

That he was fired for expressing his religious viewpoint, we said, was an unacceptable reason that will not stand up in court. Codes of academic freedom were written expressly to combat abuses like this, and that is why this case had to be taken seriously.

It is not up to faculty chairs or deans to sit in judgment on the moral propriety of any religious orientation. Moreover, viewpoint discrimination is not tolerable, especially in higher education. Thus, the University of Illinois had gotten itself into a jam.

A few weeks after he was fired, Professor Howell was informed by the University of Illinois that he could return this fall to teach courses on Catholicism. However, instead of being paid by the Diocese of Peoria, as his original set up was, the University would pay his salary.

The University of Illinois made the right decision to reverse the earlier ruling that stripped Ken Howell of his adjunct position. Regarding the termination of the arrangement with the Diocese of Peoria, a plausible case can be made that it was time to reassess this relationship. But this issue was not entirely over.

As of our press date, a faculty committee had yet to rule on whether Professor Howell's academic freedom had been violated. More important, at least in the long run, is the matter of religious freedom.

To be specific, what right does an institution of higher education have in encroaching on the religious beliefs of administrators, faculty and students? This is especially relevant today given the tendency on many college campuses to pressure Christians into adopting a radical secular mindset on homosexuality.

Notwithstanding our reservations, this was good news coming from the University of Illinois, and it was even better news for people of faith, especially Catholics. We are glad we offered our assistance to Professor Howell; we certainly wish him all the best.

The most amazing part of this story is that we are still fighting battles like this in 2010. No professor should have to tip-toe when discussing religion in a college classroom.