

Expelling God from the University

David French

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Emily Brooker is a recent honors graduate in social work from Missouri State University. A bright and attractive young woman, she has a ready smile, a heart for serving the poor, and an enduring stain on an otherwise sterling academic record.

University of Florida student Christine Miller is one of the most engaging people you will ever encounter. Compassionate, intelligent, and intellectually curious, she serves her classmates as an R.A., and by all accounts she is widely admired. She, too, is living with a stain on her record.

Scott Savage is a pacifist. He is gentle in speech, slow to anger, and almost painfully thoughtful in conversations. He is a librarian at The Ohio State University's Mansfield campus, and the dark cloud of a faculty-initiated harassment investigation hovers over him still.

From the threats of violence directed against Ruth Malhotra at Georgia Tech, to the attempted expulsion of Ed Swan at Washington State, and the actual expulsion of Scott McConnell at Le Moyne College, the stories go on and on—one of the great underreported scandals of higher education. It is as if the academic establishment has collectively decided a certain group of people is so reprehensible and abhorrent that they must change or be cast aside, relegated to the dustbin of history along with the racists of the Old South.

And who are Emily, Christine, Scott, and the others? They are certainly not violent or radicals of any stripe. In fact,

their political views vary widely—they have different views about the Iraq war, on economic programs, and even social issues. They do, however, share a single, defining characteristic: they are theologically conservative Christians, who believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God .

For Emily Brooker, it all started when one of her professors gave her class an assignment to draft a joint letter that was intended to express public support for same-sex adoption. While she has no problem exploring alternative views in class, she drew the line at drafting and signing a public document expressing a viewpoint that violated her deeply held beliefs. For her respectful moral stand, she was investigated by the socialwork department and charged with ethics violations.

Christine Miller made the mistake of expressing a Biblically orthodox view of sexual morality—that sex should be reserved for a man and woman within marriage. She was reprimanded by a university housing department who saw that view as incompatible with its own expressed “solidarity” with the university’s “GLBT community.”

Scott Savage’s case is even more bizarre. He volunteered to serve on a book selection committee for the “First Year Reading Experience”—suggesting book options for freshman students. After the other members of the committee suggested a series of books from a leftist perspective, Scott suggested the students read a series of conservative books, including one, *The Marketing of Evil*, by David Kupelian, that refers to homosexual sexual behavior as “sinful” or “evil.” Acting on complaints from homosexual faculty that the book recommendation made them feel “unsafe” on campus, the faculty assembly voted without dissent to accuse Scott of “sexual harassment.” Later, several professors—acting with the full knowledge and express approval of the faculty—filed formal charges against Scott.

And what of Ruth Malhotra, Ed Swan, and Scott McConnell? Ruth was threatened after challenging Georgia Tech's unconstitutional policies in court. Ed was almost denied a degree after he expressed opposition to same-sex adoption and affirmative action during classroom discussions. Scott was actually expelled after writing a paper in which he decried the multicultural orthodoxy of the school and noted that corporal punishment could be an appropriate method of school discipline.

While a few anecdotes do not necessarily describe a trend, or even a crisis, the anecdotes keep coming and coming. In the last six years, approximately 50 colleges and universities have either expelled or attempted to expel Christian student groups from campus. These actions have led to multiple lawsuits as Christians struggle to maintain ministries that have—in some cases—existed for decades. Student groups have sued Rutgers, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ohio State University, Southern Illinois University, Penn State, the University of Minnesota, Washburn University, Arizona State, the University of California at Hastings, Cal State Long Beach, and San Diego State all in the effort to maintain a presence on campus.

Aside from the actual violation of their rights, Christian students widely report their faith being mocked by professors and fellow students alike. A January 2005, article in the *Christian Science Monitor* documented some of these stories. The article begins:

When Chris Gruener moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to begin graduate school, he looked forward to experiencing the region's renowned tolerance of all people and lifestyles.

Mr. Gruener was raised in a devout Christian family

near Seattle and attended a Baptist high school and a Christian college, where he studied business. His passion, however, was literature, and so he was excited to begin a master's program in English at Sonoma State University. But during his first semester, a classroom incident put a damper on Gruener's ardor.

While lecturing on James Joyce's rejection of the church, a professor drew two mountains with a valley between them on the chalkboard, explaining that Joyce's church believed one mountain was man and the other mountain was God.

Next he drew a cross in the valley, touching both peaks—a visual metaphor Gruener knew from childhood—and explained that this was Christ on the cross connecting man to God. Then the professor broke into peals of mocking laughter. The rest of the class joined in.

Stories like this are not uncommon. Spend any time at all with a Christian fellowship group at a secular university and you will hear similar tales. If the students are fortunate, their experience is limited to mere mockery. All too often, however, the mockery moves into actual action, and the students face the censorship, punishment, and threats outlined above.

Beyond the anecdotes are the statistics, which show that Christian faculty are profoundly underrepresented in higher education and that Christian students dramatically abandon faith practice as they progress through college. According to Stanley Rothman, Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte's recent analysis of the role of politics and ideology in faculty professional advancement, "religiously observant Christians are disadvantaged in their placement in the institutional hierarchy" even "after taking their professional achievements into account ... Republicans, women, and practicing Christians

fare significantly worse than their colleagues at similar levels of achievement.”

Clearly, when it comes to religion, the campus culture wars are building to a climax. Not content with cleansing our secular universities of an institutional religious presence, the academic left moves now to remove any meaningful individual religious voice. Why?

The answer lies in an important article by Maggie Gallagher in the 15 June 2006 issue of the *Weekly Standard*. In “Banned in Boston,” Gallagher outlined the next phase of the constitutional conflict: the assault on fundamental civil liberties in the name of civil rights for homosexuals.

Now, if same-sex marriage and gay rights” are the next great civil rights struggle, then campus administrators and faculty are cast in the role of Martin Luther King and those who defend traditional sexual morality take the role of Eugene “Bull” Connor. To the campus establishment, there is no functional or moral difference between an evangelical Christian proponent of traditional Judeo-Christian sexual morality and George Wallace standing in the schoolhouse door.

When viewed through this prism, each of the cases discussed above makes sense. Emily Brooker and Ed Swan opposed same-sex adoption; Christine Miller and Scott Savage think that homosexual sex is sinful. Ruth Malhotra opposed speech codes designed to protect homosexuals from “hate speech,” and even Scott McConnell’s opposition to “multiculturalism” can be read as a stand-in for moral opposition to the university’s agenda. And for each of the Christian fellowships booted from campus, the issue is their alleged “discrimination” when they choose to reserve membership and leadership of Christian organizations for practicing Christians. As cases at Tufts University, Hastings, Southern Illinois, Ohio State University, and elsewhere make clear, the real university concern is not whether groups like Muslims or Jews can join

Campus Crusade for Christ but instead whether practicing homosexuals have the opportunity to join (or even lead).

What is also crucial to note is that none of the Christians in any of the cases above had taken any action whatsoever to censor, silence, or deprive any homosexual student of their rights recognized by law. It is not as if Christian student groups are asking that they be permitted to organize while "gay rights" groups stand on the sidelines. Ruth Malhotra's opposition to speech codes would have the practical effect of granting greater free-speech rights to everyone. Scott Savage was not asking that any member of the faculty be silenced. He simply made a book recommendation.

The campus culture wars will continue until one side triumphs. There is too much at stake for our side not to win.

David French is a senior legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) and the former president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. He served as counsel to the students mentioned. This is an excerpt of an article from the Spring 2006 edition of Academic Questions. It is reprinted here with the permission of Mr. French and the publisher.