

# OFFENDING THE DONS OF DIVERSITY

Bill Donohue

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) established a fine code on academic freedom in 1940. The freedom of professors to express their views must be respected, it insisted, and this certainly applied to religious speech. Its directive to college administrators was plain: "Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment."

It is not a matter of debate that Kenneth J. Howell has never been informed by administrators at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that he may not discuss what the Roman Catholic Church teaches about natural law and how it applies to homosexuality. Yet that was the reason this adjunct professor of religious studies was fired: His superiors objected to this teaching, and so they decided to punish the messenger. A clearer violation of academic freedom would be hard to find.

Besides academic freedom, there are the First Amendment protections afforded freedom of speech (the university is a state institution, so the Constitution is operative) and freedom of religion. Viewpoint discrimination, which is what happened in this instance, is taken very seriously by the courts. One might have thought that with all the legal rights stacked heavily in Mr. Howell's corner, even disrespecting and censorial administrators would have decided not to pursue this case. Prudence, obviously, is not a virtue they possess. But don't they have any lawyers on staff?

If Mr. Howell were forcing students to accept Catholic natural

law teachings as the only acceptable response to the issue of homosexuality, that would be one thing. However, when he is fired for explaining this teaching in an e-mail to a student, the infraction of academic freedom and his constitutional rights is even more disturbing.

Whether the Church is right about any of its teachings should matter as much as whether the teachings of Judaism, Islam and other world religions are right. To wit: It should not matter. Marxism is taught regularly on college campuses, and often in a manner that more closely resembles indoctrination than instruction. Yet few complain. So why is it that religious teachings are treated differently?

Let's face it: religious teachings are not really the issue this time. Nor, for that matter, is Roman Catholicism per se. No one at the University of Illinois will ever be disciplined, much less fired, for discussing the social justice teachings of papal encyclicals and their call for economic justice. Yet when it comes to challenging the conventional wisdom on homosexuality, that's a different story altogether. Indeed, it would not matter if the source of such a perspective were purely secular. What matters is that such speech can never be tolerated.

What happened to Mr. Howell may not be typical of the way conservative speech is treated on campus, but it is nonetheless true that in almost all instances when academic speech is violated, conservatives are the victims of speech codes and related punitive measures. The dirty little secret on college campuses—and there are few exceptions—is that diversity of thought is the one expression of diversity that is taboo.

Quite frankly, diversity of speech when it comes to matters sexual is the least tolerated on campus, whether it be challenging the prevailing wisdom on nature-based explanations for gender inequality, same-sex marriage or homosexuality.

When the source of such views is religious, the case for censorship is secured. And no religion offends the dons of diversity more than Catholicism.

Those who think this an exaggeration need to ask themselves how many times they can remember when a left-wing speaker was denied the right to express himself on campus. Leftists are almost never shouted down, hissed at or otherwise censored, and everyone knows it; it's always conservatives who are the victims of such tactics. Want hard evidence? Try reading *The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses* by University of Pennsylvania professor Alan Charles Kors and civil libertarian attorney Harvey A. Silverglate.

From all accounts, Ken Howell is a well-liked and admired professor. What happened to him is a travesty of the first order. Even those who strongly disagree with his views have an obligation to respect his right to express them. That's what the AAUP sought to do 70 years ago, and that's what the University of Illinois should do today. It should pivot and drop its case against this innocent man.

This piece was featured in the July 20 edition of the *Washington Times*. See the following articles to see how this issue was resolved: CATHOLIC PROFESSOR WINS JOB BACK and CAMPUSES SPONSOR GAY THOUGHT CONTROL