



PROVIDENCE
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

June 7, 2012

James L. Turk
Canadian Association of University Teachers
2705 Queensview Drive
Ottawa ON
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Dear Mr. Turk,

This letter is in response to your invitation of March 8, 2012, to provide a response to the CAUT asseveration that Providence University College does not have academic freedom. You arrived at this conclusion by observing that Providence includes in its institutional mission a Covenant of Community Faith and a Covenant of Community Life. Each of these is posted on the Providence website as a statement to all stakeholders concerning its posted mission statement: *Providence is a Christian academic community in the evangelical tradition that teaches people to grow in knowledge and character for leadership and service.*

The Providence Faculty Handbooks have well-articulated statements on academic freedom that assure all professors are able to pursue research in their area of discipline without institutional interference. The statement says in part:

- Freedom to engage in research and writing within his or her field of expertise, employing the tools of their discipline, guided by the pursuit of truth, and following wherever it leads, and
- the right to teach, research and write with freedom from institutional censorship or discipline.

CAUT has passed judgment on Providence without review of these statements, without consultation of anyone at Providence, and without any offer to discuss the review first submitted. Providence was sent a letter asking for a confirmation of the web site content; upon receipt of confirmation, and without any further investigations or discussions, you have made your judgment.

The posted response of CAUT following its review of the website would indicate that CAUT deems itself to have the power to define a university. The university enterprise as defined by CAUT is rather astonishing, given the history of university education in Manitoba. The University of Manitoba came into being in 1877, with the provincial union of three church schools: College de Saint Boniface (Catholic); Saint John's College (Anglican); and the Scottish Presbyterian Manitoba College.¹ The University of Manitoba did not offer any teaching of its own until 1900 when the act was amended to allow the university to teach courses in its own right. For CAUT to think it now has the prerogative to exclude such colleges from university education, without making any inquiry with the faculty of such colleges, is audacious in the extreme.

Every educational enterprise, as every human alive, must function with an adopted faith. As expressed by Yinger, "It is not the nature of belief, but the nature of believing that requires our study."² Whether this discriminatory influence happens at the level of the department or at the level of the institution is completely irrelevant as far as the pursuit of knowledge is concerned. Invariably, there are limits and parameters from which knowledge is preserved, advanced and disseminated, which is the function of a university. As expressed in my earlier correspondence, an open statement on the religion of the department or institution concerned is much better than the covert practice of such discrimination.

The demand that every university conform to the CAUT definition of university is rather presumptuous, given that there is an association of Universities and Colleges in Canada. For the employee to tell the employer what they must be to qualify as a university is completely contrary to a democratic society. Why, at the most prestigious levels of education, is the tail so enthusiastically attempting to wag the dog? This is not a question about academic freedom but about demands concerning conditions of employment. These should not be confused.

Concerning employment, CAUT must allow that there are limits to which activities of a professor can be supported in the name of research. I cite as an example Philippe Rushton of the University of Western Ontario. While the university has retained him in its employ, it has twice reprimanded him for his methods of research. In other words, there is no such thing as pursuit of knowledge apart from institutional constraints in any university.

If CAUT were truly interested in academic freedom in a democratic society, it would encourage the public support for the pursuit of knowledge from those religious perspectives represented in a society, and not simply attempt to restrict these pursuits to the secular. The secular restriction might seem to be avoided at the institutional level, but this is meaningless given that only departments hire, and often departments have restrictions that screen for political, social and faith implications. CAUT should for example be enthusiastically supportive of a Muslim university; what could be more educational for the general population in a democratic society than practitioners of a faith supported in their pursuit of the preservation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, unencumbered by the restrictions of other secular faith perspectives being imposed on their own research?

Further, there are many students that will be better served in an institution that supports their religious perspective; they may actually attend there, but would not voluntarily go to an institution that they know could be oppressive to their own pursuit of knowledge because of its hostile attitudes. It is no secret that Christians in Canadian universities have been directly attacked and even ridiculed by professors in class. My most recent example is a professor that walked to the desk of the student that had questioned him with her Christian view, stared right at her, demanding to know how her view could be valid. In the end, the professor had to concede that he didn't actually know anything about Christianity, as is so often the case. Christianity is attacked by those that know nothing about it. This most recent example grew out of a pastoral conference in Steinbach. This is not academic freedom. But CAUT actively resists what is a logical solution to this problem, and certainly does nothing to correct it or even address it with its members.

It does not appear to me that CAUT is fundamentally interested in the preservation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge in its pontificating on the matter of academic freedom. It frankly is most interested in its own religious agenda; it cannot even be said to be acting in the interests of its members, since no member from the institutions listed in violation has ever complained to CAUT. This is a very cynical approach to education that is to be supported by the people and for the people.

Your responses so far would only seem to confirm that CAUT has a covert agenda of its own. Your protestations concerning academic freedom are more pretention than substance.

Respectfully,



August H. Konkel
President

cc. Gordon Giesbrecht
Robert Chernomas

References

1. Emöke J. Száthmáry, "The Importance of Religious Colleges – A Secular Perspective," *Didaskalia* 22 (2011) 107-110.
2. J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York Macmillan, 1970), 11.