



November 5, 2012

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Dr. Mary E. Lyons
President
University of San Diego
5998 Alcalá Park
San Diego, California 92110-2492

Dear President Lyons:

More than four years ago, as you may recall, we wrote to convey our Association's concerns about the decision by the University of San Diego administration to withdraw the offer of an appointment to Professor Rosemary Ruether to hold the Portman Chair in Roman Catholic Theology for the fall 2009 semester. In that letter we took note of widespread reports that the administration's action was in response to outside pressures from "individuals and groups who [took] issue with Professor Ruether's views on a number of hotly debated Catholic precepts." We wrote at the time of our "deep concern about the ramifications of the administration's action in the Ruether case for the health of academic freedom at the University of San Diego." A copy of my letter of August 4, 2008, is enclosed for your convenience.

We were surprised and disappointed to learn late last week that another case has arisen at the university that poses issues and raises concerns that are strikingly similar to those involved in the Ruether case. According to the information we have received, Dr. Tina Beattie, professor of Catholic Studies and director of the Digby Stuart Research Center for Religion, Society, and Human Flourishing at the University of Roehampton in London, was invited last year by the director of USD's Frances G. Harpst Center of Catholic Thought and Culture, Professor Gerard Mannion, to be a visiting fellow at the center this fall to present a series of public lectures and seminars. Less than two weeks before she was to take up this position, you notified Professor Beattie, in a letter dated October 27, that you were rescinding the invitation—an invitation extended, we understand, with the full knowledge and support of USD's senior administration—on grounds of a purported "contradiction between the mission of the Center and [her] public stances as a Catholic theologian." Your concerns, you have indicated elsewhere, relate specifically to Professor Beattie's having signed this past August 13, along with twenty-six other prominent British Catholics, a widely distributed letter to *The Times* of London, stating that "it is perfectly proper for Catholics, using fully informed consciences, to support the legal extension of civil marriage to same-sex couples." As you have written to the chair of USD's University Senate,

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Professor Amy Besnoy, you found it “significant that [Professor Beattie] signed the letter as a ‘theologian.’ This action is materially different from the exercise of scholarship and teaching appropriate to the role of an academic and whose freedom to do so I consistently defend. . . . Dr. Beattie's decision to exercise her office as a Catholic theologian and sign a public document dissenting from the Church’s official teaching is what led me to rescind the invitation.”

We understand that you reached your decision without ever having discussed the matter with either Professor Beattie or Professor Mannion. Professor Beattie has protested the fact that “you made no attempt to approach me to find out my position or to invite my response to the complaints . . . you have received about me.” Professor Mannion, writing to Professor Beattie, has stated that “at no stage was I consulted about the decision to cancel your visit nor informed in advance. I learned at the same time you did. In fact I had received assurances from other senior administrators that the visit would go ahead because this was a question of academic freedom.”

Both Professors Beattie and Mannion, along with others, have noted that the invitation for her to visit had been strongly and publicly protested, only days before its rescission, by groups such as the Cardinal Newman Society and Alumni for a Catholic USD. Whatever the accuracy of reports that the administration was pressured to act by these groups and by the university’s financial supporters, Professor Beattie has complained, as has Professor Mannion, that your letters to both of them contain what he has described as “factual inaccuracies and apparently ambivalent and/or misleading statements.” Professor Beattie has further complained about “allegations . . . being made about me by various Catholic bloggers” who have engaged, she contends, in “serious distortions of my theological position through the publication of highly selective and decontextualized quotations from my work.” With regard to the August 13 letter to the *Times*, she has written the following “point of clarification” to the AAUP:

I signed the letter but did not include “theologian”: that was added by the author of the letter prior to publication. The same designation is applied to other signatories who, like me, are practising Catholics who are also academic theologians. The designation does not say “Catholic theologian.” The point is, I am an academic theologian. What am I supposed to call myself? My job title is “Professor of Catholic Studies.” I do not claim to be a “Catholic theologian” in such a way that I would be presenting myself as authorised by the official magisterium to teach on behalf of the Church.

As for those groups who protested her visit, Professor Beattie has stated that her “proposed public lectures and seminars in San Diego were all . . . written with a broad audience in mind, and with a desire not to create problems for my hosts by provoking controversy in the currently febrile atmosphere of American Catholic politics.” Echoing her statement that she

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planned to avoid any controversial or disputed issues of Church teaching, Professor Mannion informed you in his October 29 letter that “not one single talk that Professor Beattie was scheduled to give was even directly related to the flash-point topic that those protesters have focused upon to smear her name.” He further wrote that, “despite the shocking and libelous campaign by some to try to prevent Professor Beattie’s visit, I had recently received assurances from members of the university senior administration that this visit was not in danger.” He concluded by expressing concern that your decision and the stated grounds on which you reached it “carry potentially grave and detrimental implications for academic freedom both at USD and beyond.” We understand that similar expressions of concern have been voiced by numerous other faculty members at the university and elsewhere.

When we wrote to you four years ago about the Ruether case, we closed our letter by quoting from the final paragraph of Professor Ruether’s statement to you concerning the rescission of the invitation to her:

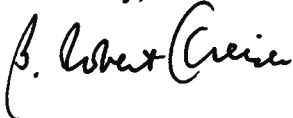
. . . I am very saddened by this experience and concerned about what it means for academic freedom at the University of San Diego and, by implication, about the state of academic freedom at Catholic colleges generally. Indeed a good part of the reason I was willing to make myself available for a modest presence at the University of San Diego is that I am interested in promoting conversation about important issues . . . in Catholic venues. The invitation seemed to me to express a warm interest in such dialogue. What is evident is that others, both in the administration of this university and among some Catholic pressure groups from outside, do not want such conversation to take place. That seems to me to be a serious betrayal of the educational mission of any college and, in particular, a Catholic college.

It would appear that these words may be as relevant to the rescission of Professor Beattie’s invitation as they were to Professor Ruether’s.

The information in our possession on the case of Professor Beattie has come to us from her and from other faculty sources at the University of San Diego and elsewhere as well as from press reports, and we appreciate that you may have additional information that would contribute to our understanding of the serious issues of academic freedom with which we are concerned. We would therefore welcome your comments.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Robert Kreiser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a distinct "Kreiser" at the end.

B. Robert Kreiser
Associate Secretary

BRK:id
Enclosure

cc: Mr. Ronald L. Fowler, Chair, Board of Trustees
Dr. Julie Sullivan, Executive Vice President and Provost
Professor Gerard Mannion, Director, Center for Catholic Thought and Culture
Professor Amy Besnoy, Chair, University Senate
Dr. Paul O'Prey, Vice Chancellor, University of Roehampton
Professor Tina Beattie
Professor Henry Reichman, Chair, AAUP Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure