

Statement to the College of Arts and Sciences' Academic Assembly

I am very grateful to the Chair and the Academic Assembly for the opportunity to address you. Despite what it says on the front of my T-Shirt, I stand here not as Tina Beattie, but I certainly wish to speak in defence of Tina Beattie. I also speak as a common or garden theologian and in a personal capacity. I also speak as a Roman Catholic, a faith that emerged thanks to the inspiring teachings of an extraordinarily charismatic young man who dissented publicly against the religious authorities of his day.

I was surprised, shocked and deeply disappointed by this decision. Not only was I not consulted about it nor forewarned, I had received assurances from senior administrators earlier that week that Prof. Beattie's visit would go ahead because this was clearly a question of academic freedom.

I find the public rationale offered for the decision deeply disturbing on several fronts. First, the statements about the mission of the Center, its donors and positions one might assume that guests invited by the Center would take to be utterly novel to the person who is now in his third year as Center director. Second, they run directly counter to assurances about academic freedom that I received before and since taking up the position. Third, Professor Beattie is in no way guilty of what that rationale purports her to be guilty of. Even if she were, the university's policy on academic freedom would surely safeguard her against sanction. USD and the CCTC itself have previously had speakers who would fall foul of this new injunction.

Even if such a policy vetoing speakers existed (and it evidently does not), this has alarming implications for all faculty at USD and far beyond. Are speakers to be disinvited if they publicly defend another theologian condemned by the Vatican (as Prof. Beattie defended Jon Sobrino, along with myself and others on the Committee of the Catholic Theological Society of Great Britain in 2007)? Are those who publicly speak against church teaching on artificial contraception or divorce and remarriage or the recent liturgical changes to be disinvited? What if right wing theologians wrote to defend Paul Ryan's economic policies, which clearly flout numerous Church social teachings and statements? Or they defended the unjust wars that the church clearly has spoken out against? Will USD now ban the Officers' Training Corp from

campus and all military personnel studying at USD? Let's not pretend that any of these issues would have USD in the position it is now in.

Even if Prof. Beattie had signed a letter dissenting from the Church's infallible teaching judgment concerning the Immaculate Conception, as authoritative a doctrine as the church has and pertinent because the beautiful church in the centre of campus is called the Immaculata, few doubt that Prof. Beattie would today be flying over the Atlantic en route to California as opposed to sitting in London. It is clear that people have been very, very badly advised here. Had they spoken with myself and Prof. Beattie all of this negative impact would have been avoided. Instead, I am led to believe the previous director of the CCTC, who has waged a behind the scenes campaign against the Center since 2010, has regularly been giving advice to USD's President.

And yet, to date, the present director has not been spoken to about this matter at all by President Lyons. A letter to her, from myself (Oct. 29) outlining the errors and implications of this decision has received no reply. On Oct 31, the Center's Advisory Council requested a meeting with President Lyons as a matter of urgency. That request also remains without acknowledgment or response.

But it is never too late - USD can pick up the phone and re-invite Prof. Beattie tomorrow. It is important that people at USD, in the church and beyond now stand up and be counted and say enough. We must not forget one vitriolic individual behind a veil of anonymity started all this by cherry-picking small lines from Prof. Beattie's writings and juxtaposing them under lurid and sensationalist banners and sending them to exactly the reactionaries in the California area they knew would cause mayhem. It is time that USD's senior administration, as well as the church's authorities condemned these tactics of people who understand the faith all too poorly and practice it even less well. Thank you very much for listening.

Gerard Mannion

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