

ACADEMIC FREEDOM HYPOTHETICAL CASES

**Handout for the Workshop:
“What Does Academic Freedom Mean
at a Christian Institution of Higher Education?”
ABHE Annual Meeting, February 2018
presented by
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#1. Dr. Joseph Albertson is a faculty member at Christian University, teaching Church History. During a symposium at a recent academic conference he said:

“Christ commanded us to love God and our neighbor, and he called us to have faith in him and to serve others. He told us a few key things about himself, but he did not establish a specific creed that we must adhere to in order to be saved. The creeds over which Christians have fought during the past 1,800 years are the attempt of humans—many of them no doubt inspired by God—to describe the Trinity. Frankly, we do not know which creed or creeds are correct. Of course we believe in the Bible as the Word of God, and we know that the creeds can guide us in our beliefs, but we don’t know which if any of the creeds is correct. Over the centuries, there have been hundreds of them, each with its enthusiastic adherents, and each conflicting with the others in some way, however large or small. My view is that when it comes to creeds, we can only look through a glass, darkly. We may know in the hereafter, but we don’t know now. So what should we do? I think we should focus on loving God, loving our neighbors, having faith in Christ, and serving others. We can and should affirm the creeds that speak to us, but we should be humble when we do so. Doctrinal creeds are basically the attempt of mortals like us to describe the indescribable. The God whom we worship with all our hearts is far beyond our ability as human beings to fully describe or comprehend.”

Would Dr. Albertson’s comments at the academic conference be protected by academic freedom at your university? Why or why not?

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#2. Juliet Forrester is a faculty member at Christian University, teaching English Composition. In one of her classes, she said:

“I don’t understand the fixation that some Christians have regarding homosexuality. Scientists estimate that 3 to 5 percent of the population is born homosexual, the same way

people are born with red hair, or have the DNA to be tall or short. It's not their fault—they didn't choose to be born that way. We need to remember that we are all children of God, created in his image, and Jesus calls us to love everyone. Jesus reached out to outcasts, to the marginalized. Anything we do toward homosexuals that is not based on love contradicts the teachings of Jesus. We don't have to agree with them, but we do have to love them and reach out to them."

When a student argued that the Bible makes homosexual behavior a sin, Forrester responded:

"Christians are being very selective about that. When you look at Leviticus, yes, it says that if a man lies with another man, it is detestable, and they must be put to death. But what about all the other decrees that are listed in the same passage? If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. If anyone commits adultery, both parties must be put to death. If anyone has sex with an animal, he or she must be put to death. And so on. There is a long list of prohibitions, but nobody is focusing on the rest of the list, just the homosexual part. And why are we looking at a list that nobody's followed—not even Jews—for thousands of years? We don't kill our children when they talk back to their parents, do we? We don't kill adulterers, do we? Why do we ignore those decrees and focus only on homosexuality? Then there is Paul. Yes, Paul was outraged by Roman sexual behavior. But that behavior included a wide range of sexual activities, not just homosexuality. It just seems to me that Christians are going out of their way to find a Biblical basis to attack homosexuals. Why aren't Christians worried about fornication and divorce? The Bible is against fornication and divorce, and they are ten times more widespread than homosexuality. What are Christians doing about it? For that matter, what about issues like poverty, or domestic abuse, or drug use? Those issues are more important and affect a lot more people than homosexuality. It is really sad to see how many important issues are being ignored because Christians are so homophobic."

Would Juliet Forrester's in-class comments be protected by academic freedom at your university? Why or why not?

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#3. Dr. Beverly Mendoza is a faculty member at Christian University, teaching World Religions. She explained to her class that, as a Filipina, she grew up in a part of the Philippines that had a large Muslim population. During the course she taught at Christian University, she took her class to a local Muslim mosque, where the students entered into a dialogue with the *imam*. Then, during Advent, she decided to wear a *hijab* in solidarity with Muslims in America who are being persecuted because of their faith. To explain her action, she posted this on her social media:

“I love my Muslim neighbor because she or he deserves love by virtue of his or her human dignity. I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book. And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God.”

Would Dr. Mendoza’s actions and social media statements be protected by academic freedom at your university? Why or why not?

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#4. Dr. John Nakabayashi teaches Church Doctrine at Christian University. Recently, he sent a list of books to the Library Director, asking her to order the books for the library, so they would be available to students in his classes. The books related to controversies such as the role of women in the church, the security of the believer’s salvation, speaking in tongues as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the rapture and eschatology, free will versus predestination, and the question of whether there is a hell or total annihilation. The books appeared to present a variety of points of view on each of the issues. A member of the Library Committee learned of the list of requested books, and was troubled by the topics and the various positions taken by the authors. The committee member called other committee members, who then met to discuss the list. After lengthy discussion, the Library Committee decided that the books should not be ordered and placed in the library. Reluctantly, the Library Director agreed, and informed Dr. Nakabayashi of the decision.

Would this have been a violation of academic freedom at your university? Why or why not?

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