

## A Reply

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Today's Charlotte Observer notes in its lead editorial that "Values have collided" at Davidson College on the issue of Christian tenure. And indeed they have. President Spencer has written that this represents an "important and basic" matter worthy of "legitimate and rational" discussion, and has invited debate of the matter by the Davidson community. I am pleased to engage in this discussion.

President Spencer writes that "A common Christian commitment does not and must not for a moment imply denial of freedom of speech." At first glance he seems entirely correct for that right is guaranteed by the First Amendment and available to any U. S. citizen. At Davidson we can speak our minds and we can invite outside speakers of any religious or political persuasion to present their views. But the instrument of Christian tenure does insure that a faculty member who has been here for less time than that required for tenure, will pay the penalty of not receiving tenure (he will be dismissed) for freely expressing his beliefs if they are contrary to the "Christian Commitment" section of the College's Statement of Purpose. Davidson has had non-Christians on its faculty who have not received tenure. Free speech, yes; but when the content of what is freely spoken conflicts with the stated religious expressions of the college, then the penalty of seeking other employment necessarily follows. Free Speech does have limits; one cannot yell "Fire" in a crowded Boston theatre when there is no fire. But is one of those limits religious dissent and the expression of unorthodox beliefs? Many immigrants fled religious persecution in Europe seeking religious freedom in America. Our tradition has become one of freedom of religion also guaranteed by that same First Amendment. For some, at Davidson,

then, free speech does not extend to the debate of religious issues, for the untenured faculty member knows that if he expresses a faith like Judaism he cannot remain on the faculty. The policy that grants exceptions for "reverent seekers" seems complicated and ambiguous when it still demands an agreement to support and further the "Christian Commitment" of the Statement of Purpose. How could a conscientious Jew "support" Christian Commitment? Is he to advocate Christian Commitment? Respect it? Ignore it? Or close his eyes and mumble something unintelligible?

Although the tenured Christian faculty member at Davidson does have free speech and the untenured does not in matters of religion, the policy of Christian tenure denies the right of academic freedom, a right central to the tradition of higher education and more recently recognized by U. S. courts. Any religious or political limitations upon qualifications for tenure may prevent a professor from further exploring issues freely and openly. When religious limitations are placed upon tenure, only one religious point of view can be espoused by permanent faculty members on the campus. And the argument that such committed Christians can easily teach the beliefs of non-Christian religions is weak, if not self-contradictory. For the truly committed Christian always interprets another religion in the light of his own beliefs and while he may attempt to be as objective as possible in presenting Buddhism or Judaism, he cannot do so nearly as accurately or as fairly as an exponent of that religion. To debate important religious questions, (adequately and fairly) advocates of opposing positions must be heard. And to claim that the occasional speaker brought to the campus to express an opposing view can present his dissent as effectively as the professor speaking to the question on a daily basis in the classroom, loads the issue in favor of the tenured orthodox professor who has forty or more hours to make his point as against the one of two of the visitor.

Those who advocate Christian tenure as a requirement for Davidson College have an understandable position. They fear that Davidson will become a secularized institution without it. But their means of preventing secularization are so desperate and severe as to destroy the institution through discriminatory and un-Christian acts. People with perfectly good intentions, the desire of creating a community with Christian values, have employed methods resulting in unforeseen evil consequences. It would be better to insure the presence of the Christian faith on the campus through a strong religion department, through a strong program of campus ministry, and through Christian behavior, the love and respect of other persons including a respect for their freedom of expression. Davidson can test its institutional actions by the standards of how individuals are treated. Are individuals treated with Christian love and concern, or are they merely shunted aside because of their beliefs or ignored because they are considered to be insignificant?

Certainly Davidson has the legal right to become a sectarian school dedicated to the indoctrination of its youth with religious beliefs of one persuasion. Certainly Davidson can prevent political and religious points of view from being espoused on this campus by limiting tenure. Certainly Davidson can pursue its present policy of excluding Jews and other non-Christians from its faculty as permanent members. To do so will be to ruin the splendid academic reputation of the college as an institution of higher learning. To do so will be to violate the concepts of Christian freedom that arise from faith in Jesus Christ. To do so will be to alienate most Americans for whom exclusion on the basis of race, religion or political beliefs is abhorrent. To do so will be to lose community and alumni support for there are few in America who are willing to return to the practices of earlier times when such freedoms were infringed.

The most poignant and ironic aspect of this debate arises from the fact that many Davidson professors, especially the non-tenured, are afraid to speak out on this issue since it deals with religion and they know that the official policy of the college makes one liable to lose one's job (not receive tenure) if one expresses religious dissent from the official religious position of the college. It is a slight move from demanding agreement to basic religious beliefs for tenure to demanding adherence to specific orthodox statements of belief. Where does one draw the line? Better not to coerce a person's religious beliefs to begin with.

I want Davidson College to be both a Christian college and an institution of higher learning where the free pursuit of truth is possible without discrimination. And I believe that these two goals are not at all incompatible.