

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

Report of the CAUT Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee

Regarding an ideological or faith test as condition
of employment at Providence University College

William Bruneau and Robert Chernomas

January 2012

Consistent with policy passed by the Council of the Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT] in 2006, the CAUT reviews cases of “alleged violations of academic freedom involving a required commitment to a particular ideology or statement of faith as a condition of employment.”¹ When it is alleged that a university has a faith or ideological test as a condition of employment, CAUT appoints an ad hoc investigatory committee to determine if the allegation is true. If the committee confirms the allegation, the university is added to the list on the CAUT website of institutions that violate academic freedom by imposing ideological or faith tests as a condition of employment. The committee’s report and any comment by the university are posted on the CAUT website.

On 31 August 2011, Professors William Bruneau (Emeritus, University of British Columbia) and Robert Chernomas (University of Manitoba) were appointed by CAUT to serve on an *ad hoc* investigatory committee concerning Providence University College which was alleged to require a faith test as a condition of employment. A few days later (8 September 2011), the Executive Director of CAUT, James L. Turk, wrote to Dr. August Konkler, President of Providence University College, announcing creation of the CAUT Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee.

During the autumn of 2011, the Committee reviewed documentation of administrative and academic policy at Providence. This included the Providence University College “Covenant of Christian Life” (including its “Epilogue”); the Providence Employment Services Department description of its requirements of new hires (“Welcome to Providence’s Employment Services Department”); the description of “Knowledge and Character for Leadership and Service”; and the winter 2011 issue of the Providence “journal,” *Eye Witness* (see http://www.providencecollege.ca/resource/file/about/Eye_Witness/EW_Winter_2011_Issue.pdf), considering the latter document a source of contextual evidence. All these documents are available on Providence University College’s website at www.providencecollege.ca.

The evidence online is straightforwardly explicit in its language. All new Providence employees, including academic employees, are required to “agree to live according to the Providence Covenant of Community life” and to be “supportive” of it. The Covenant is a self-described “statement of faith.” The Providence Employment Services page notes that:

Providence University College and Seminary is a Christian academic community in the evangelical tradition that teaches people to grow in knowledge and character for leadership and service.

The Employment Services Department provides support to Providence University College and Seminary as it fulfills this mission. The goal of the Employment Services department is to find, hire, and support people to carry out that mission.

We are governed by two covenants to which all faculty and staff commit themselves and to whose standards student employees are also held.

¹Canadian Association of University Teachers, *CAUT Procedures in Academic Freedom Cases Involving Allegations of Requirement of an Ideological or Faith Test as a Condition of Employment* (Ottawa: CAUT, 2006, rev. 2010).

- **Covenant of Faith** – Providence University College and Seminary holds and teaches the essential doctrines of the Christian faith generally embraced by evangelicals.
- **Covenant of Community Life** – The Covenant of Community Life consists of the principles and policies which guide the life and activities of the Providence community.

We seek faculty and staff who model excellence in their discipline and work, and have a clear and compelling understanding of their faith and Christian commitment. We also seek student employees who exemplify such standards.²

The first “Covenant of Faith” to which all faculty and staff commit themselves and to whose standards student employees are also held includes this “statement of faith”:³

Providence University College and Seminary holds and teaches the essential doctrines of the Christian faith embraced by evangelicals. The Covenant of Faith as approved by the board in November 2008 is as follows:

We believe the revelation given by God in Christian Scripture. We embrace the faith set forth in it as summarized in the historic creeds of the Church. We are rooted in the Protestant evangelical tradition and celebrate its international and ecumenical diversity. We affirm the following beliefs as essential to the gospel and to Christian living.

There is one living and true God, creator and sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in the communion of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father is the ground of all truth, the standard of all goodness, the measure of all beauty, who supplies providential care for all that he has made and loved.

Jesus Christ is Lord, God incarnate, fully human and fully divine, one person forever, the truth whom we seek and adore. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus lived a sinless and obedient life, atoned for sin by his death on the cross, rose bodily for our justification, and ascended to glory where he now mediates on behalf of his people.

The Holy Spirit enables believers to live holy lives by God’s regenerating, sanctifying, and illuminating power.

Holy Scripture is divinely inspired, complete, entirely trustworthy, and authoritative for faith and life. It is to be believed as God’s instruction, obeyed as God’s command, and trusted as God’s pledge.

Human beings are created male and female in the image of God. They are called to glorify God, to live in communion with God and one another, and to be stewards of God’s creation. All people fail to live up to this calling. They are sinners by nature and by

²http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/human_resources/

³http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/about_us/covenant_of_faith/

choice. Sinners are justified and renewed only by accepting the grace and mercy of God, poured out in the crucified and risen Son, who is received by faith alone.

The Church, the body of Christ, is composed of all true believers. Local churches, as the visible presence of Christ's body, are called to declare the good news of salvation through worship, discipleship, and witness among the nations.

Through the cross God triumphs over the evil powers that violently oppose God's plan and people. Jesus will visibly return to reign over all creation in power and glory. The righteous in Christ will rise to eternal life and the unrighteous to eternal separation from God.

In light of the content of Providence's online and published policies, the Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee concluded provisionally that Providence University College imposes a faith test on all persons seeking to be appointed to that institution or wishing to remain in its employ. We say "provisionally" only because we thought it wise to have official assurance that the online and published documents are up-to-date and accurate. We wrote to President Konkel precisely so that we would have that assurance. Our letter and his reply are in Appendices A and B.

Although most of Dr. Konkel's reply does not answer to the question we put to him, he confirms the accuracy of Providence's website: "I wish to assure you that Providence University College...is transparent to all of its constituency about the manner in which it supports academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge and social order." The words "is transparent" must mean that what we see is what we get at Providence. The "manner in which it [Providence] supports academic freedom" refers to the Christian ideology, theology, and or "way of life." The Providence way of assuring academic freedom comes down to this: one must accept the two Covenants of Faith and Community Life laid out in institutional policy.

Section 2 of the CAUT Policy on Academic Freedom says that "Academic freedom includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom to teach and discuss; freedom to carry out research and disseminate and publish the results thereof; freedom to produce and perform creative works; freedom to engage in service to the institution and the community; freedom to express one's opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works; freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies. Academic freedom always entails freedom from institutional censorship." Official policy at Providence University College is inconsistent with this section of CAUT policy.

Our provisional conclusion has become a firm and final conclusion: Providence University College imposes a faith test on all persons seeking to be appointed to that institution or wishing to remain in its employ.

RECOMMENDATION

We therefore recommend that Providence University College be added to CAUT's list of institutions that impose a faith test on (a) their academic staff and (b) all persons wishing to be appointed to academic staff.

A LAST COMMENT

If academic freedom means academic staff must be free from ideological, doctrinal, or theological tests, then one may argue Providence University College is a "university" in name only.

The fact that Providence has been chartered by the Legislature of the Province of Manitoba gives Providence the power to say it is a "university." But there must be substantial doubt that free teaching, instruction, research, and public comment occur at Providence. The Committee finds it disturbing that Providence courses are accepted for credit at the University of Manitoba, and that Providence degrees are accepted as credentials for entrance to University of Manitoba graduate degrees. It is less surprising that Providence academic courses and degrees may lead to further study at a short list of institutions not very different from itself. Here is a quotation from the Providence opening web page (at http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/about_us/): "Providence University College graduates have gone on to study in institutions such as the University of Manitoba, Gordon Conwell Seminary, Trinity Western University, Regent College, and the C.G.A. program."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Letter from CAUT Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee to President August Konkell – December 16, 2011;

APPENDIX B – Reply to CAUT Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee from President August Konkell – January 6, 2012.

AHIC Report - Appendix A

Providence
COPY

PROF. WILLIAM BRUNEAU
University of British Columbia
3817 West 16th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6R 3C6

*Sent by Priority Post Courier 2011/12/17
Please reply to Prof. Bruneau and to Prof. Chernomas*

PROF. ROBERT CHERNOMAS
Department of Economics
508 Fletcher Argue Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T5V5

December 16, 2011

Dr August Konkel
President
Providence University College
10 College Crescent
Otterburne, Manitoba
R0A 1G0



Dear President Konkel,

On September 8, 2011, the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT] wrote to you, indicating that the CAUT had established a committee to consider certain policies and practices of Providence University College. The *ad hoc* investigatory committee, consisting of the undersigned two persons, were charged to see whether your University College requires a statement of faith as a condition of initial and/or continuing employment on your academic staff.

The committee have been able to review the Providence University College "Covenant of Christian Life" (including its "Epilogue"); the Providence Employment Services Department description of its requirements of new hires ("Welcome to Providence's Employment Services Department"); the description of "Knowledge and Character for Leadership and Service"; and the winter2011 issue of the Providence "journal," *Eye Witness* (see http://www.providencecollege.ca/resource/file/about/Eye_Witness/EW_Winter_2011_Issue.pdf), considering the latter document a source of contextual evidence. All these documents are available starting from the website at www.providencecollege.ca .

The evidence online is straightforwardly explicit in its language. All new Providence employees, *including academic employees*, are required to "agree to live according to the Providence

Convenant of Community life” and to be “supportive” of it. The Convenant is a self-described “statement of faith.” The Providence Employment Services web page notes that

We are governed by two covenants to which all faculty and staff commit themselves and to whose standards student employees are also held.

—*Covenant of Faith*

<http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/about_us/covenant_of_faith/>

Providence University College and Seminary holds and teaches the essential doctrines of the Christian faith generally embraced by evangelicals.

—*Covenant of Community Life*

<http://www.providencecollege.ca/college/student_life/covenant_of_community_life/>

The Covenant of Community Life consists of the principles and policies which guide the life and activities of the Providence community.

We seek faculty and staff who model excellence in their discipline and work, and have a clear and compelling understanding of their faith and Christian commitment. We also seek student employees who exemplify such standards.

Although there is little ambiguity in the online text, we would be grateful to have your assurance that the policies and practices described on your website are officially agreed by you and by your Board of Governors.

If you or another appropriately placed authority at Providence assures us that the website is accurate, then our inquiry would be in a position to complete its work.

Professor Chernomas, one of the undersigned appointees to this CAUT *ad hoc* investigatory committee, will be in touch by telephone before January 15, 2012, should we have no other communication from you by that time.

Yours sincerely,



[for the Committee]

William Bruneau, Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia
Robert Chernomas, Professor of Economics, University of Manitoba

cc. James Turk, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2705 Queensview Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K2B 8K2



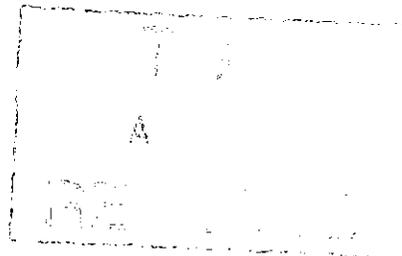
PROVIDENCE
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

January 6, 2012

CAUT AHIC Report - Appendix B

Prof. William Bruneau
University of British Columbia
3817 West 16th Avenue
Vancouver BC V6R 3C6

Prof. Robert Chernomas
Department of Economics
508 Fletcher Argue Building
University of Manitoba R3T 5V5



Dear Prof. Chernomas & Bruneau,

I am in receipt of your letter of December 16, 2011, in which you ask about about the policies of Providence University College.

I wish to assure you that Providence University College, unlike many other post secondary educational institutions in Canada, is transparent to all of its constituency about the manner in which it supports academic freedom in the pursuit of knowledge and social order.

As Charles Taylor makes evident in *A Secular Age*, modern secularity has adopted a purely self-sufficient humanism, which denies the possibility allegiance to any other value, what he calls an exclusive humanism. This is not stated, but it is practiced in many educational institutions. Exclusive humanism in its own way stifles academic freedom, because it is a controlling ideology that is not allowed to be transparent. It controls values, social mores, and epistemological pursuit.

While institutions ostensibly hire individuals of any religious persuasion, in various ways they exclude individuals from being hired when their values do not sufficiently conform to those of dominant secularism. These may have to do with beliefs about family, social ideals, or any number of contingencies deemed significant in a particular discipline. These institutional realities are not always controlled by particular individuals, but they are a collective reality that is not openly acknowledged.

Academic freedom requires transparency, and some level of collective cohesion so there can be a cooperative pursuit of knowledge and all its attendant values. Providence therefore is consistent in being clear as to its practices for freely pursuing knowledge and the flourishing of human life.

If students are to be served well and honestly, these are best practices that must be cultivated. In a free and democratic society, individuals should have the right to choose, and should know what it is they are choosing. Anything less than this is the manipulation of a kind of state control that requires a conformity of all its institutions to the exclusion of alternatives.

Not long ago when I was in England, Richard Dawkins was publicly discussing the possibility of founding an atheistic university. I assume the concept continues to be alive and well. I for one would applaud

such an effort. It has an integrity and honesty that is a refreshing contrast to the oppressive expressions of tolerance so characteristic of much of Canadian educational ethos.

I therefore consider it essential that Providence be clear in its affirmations and its values. I can only wish that secular institutions would do more to acknowledge an exclusive humanism which is their collective ideological control, as Taylor has shown. It is unfortunate that organizations like CAUT are promoting an ideology that fails to deliver in enabling freedom for those people that it ostensibly serves, namely students and society.

Yours truly,



August H. Konkel
President

cc. James Turk
Wayne D. Peters
Len Findlay