

Academic freedom takes a hit at Liberty?

Thus reads the headline on the editorial page of Sunday's always supportive (of Liberty that is) hometown news organ, *The News & Advance* (3/19/06). The editor's charge refers to the recent refusal of Liberty officials to allow the gay rights group 'Soulforce' on Liberty's campus to promote their stated agenda of ending religious bias against gays and other non heterosexual practitioners. The group was on a nationwide bus tour dubbed 'Equality Ride' that deliberately targeted 19 religious schools and military academies that ban the enrollment of non-heterosexual students presumably on religious grounds.

The editor bemoans the fact that these gay rights activists whose only 'real crime' was a desire to discuss homosexuality and religion were arrested and handcuffed as they attempted to come on the Liberty campus. Actually, to correct the esteemed editor, their only 'real offense' was trespassing on someone else's property without permission. They were not arrested for exercising free speech, only for the location in which it was exercised. Indeed, anyone who visits the annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention will routinely encounter 'Soulforce' aficionados passing out their literature in public access areas outside of the convention centers to any and all who will take it. This is their right as Americans and I gladly affirm their right, just as I relish the freedom to share my own Christian religious beliefs with others. But, that right to free speech doesn't extend into the convention center. They do not have a constitutional right to disrupt a private meeting and when they do so they have been and should be arrested for it!

As an academic, who has observed and even experienced the lack of openness to conservative theology and politics from left leaning institutions of higher learning, charging Liberty with a lack of academic freedom is both 'tiresome' and 'laughable'. Students at Liberty are exposed to a variety of viewpoints within the academic disciplines, yet these viewpoints are also analyzed from the standpoint of a Christian worldview. Yes! Liberty is a Christian University and proud to be so! The students are not forced to accept the conclusions of such Christian analysis, but they frame the learning experience at Liberty and at least here they are exposed to it.

To purloin the editor's words, the only 'real crime' that Liberty is guilty of is that the type of academic freedom that he espouses doesn't exist at Liberty. I suspect the academic freedom the editor envisions has already produced the radical excesses of professors who can't be fired even if they equate a sitting president of the United States with an Adolph Hitler--a position that is neither historically defensible nor morally rational. I am grateful that the accrediting associations still recognize the academic validity and stimulating diversity that religious colleges bring to the Academy.

Oh, by the way, Mr. Editor. How about that Liberty University debate team (national champs)! Pretty good for students who have received mindless indoctrination are they not?

Sincerely

Dave Pettus