



*The Faculty*

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**Saying He Was Punished for Revealing His Faith, Adjunct Sues Ohio College**

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An adjunct professor of philosophy at Lakeland Community College has sued the Ohio college, saying it violated his First Amendment rights when it punished him for disclosing his religious beliefs to students in class.

James G. Tuttle had taught at the college, which is outside Cleveland, for four years when a student complained, in the spring of 2003, to James L. Brown, dean of the division of arts and humanities, that Mr. Tuttle had referred to his Roman Catholic faith too often. Mr. Tuttle said this month that he was then stripped of his seniority, had his course load reduced, and ultimately was barred from teaching philosophy and religion courses.

Mr. Tuttle, who is not under contract with the college, is seeking reinstatement of his courses, back pay, and compensatory damages, according to the complaint, filed last month in U.S. District Court in Cleveland. The complaint also asserts that college officials discriminated against him on the basis of his religious beliefs.

"I don't know how to hide the fact that I am a Catholic Christian when I am teaching a philosophy course," Mr. Tuttle said. "I just want students to know where I am coming from, but I never expected to be punished for that."

Mr. Tuttle brought his case to the attention of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which is supporting his lawsuit. The group has written to college officials denouncing their actions and has blasted the college publicly.

"Surely the message is not that the university as an employer should be entitled to tell professors that their personal belief system cannot be imported," said David French, president of the organization, which is known as FIRE. "That's part and parcel of the learning process. When an institution tries to make professors hide their personal beliefs, it has grave implications for academic freedom."

Lakeland officials, citing the pending lawsuit, declined to comment.

**'Here We Go Again'**

Mr. Tuttle said that when he learned about the student's complaint, he thought, "Oh, gosh. Here we go again." It was not the first time a student had found fault with his teaching style. Two years earlier, he had engaged his students in a discussion about whether Jesus Christ was crazy. A student whose husband worked in a mental facility later complained to administrators about his use of the word "crazy," which she called offensive.

Mr. Tuttle said Mr. Brown chose not to discipline him for the incident.

After that complaint, Mr. Tuttle said, he decided to put a disclaimer on his syllabus to let students know that he is a Catholic. "Please be aware of where I am coming from and where you are coming from," the syllabus states. "If you initially feel uncomfortable with me as an instructor, please feel free to talk to me outside of the classroom."

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Mr. Tuttle said that he always encouraged open discussions and debate among his students. So when he found out about the complaint last year, from a student he described as quiet, he was confused.

In a letter to Mr. Tuttle dated April 21, 2003, Mr. Brown wrote that he was bothered by the disclaimer on the syllabus more than anything in the student's complaint. "The level of arrogance is unnerving," the letter said. "I think that you would be happier in a sectarian classroom."

Mr. Brown went on to write that he was reducing Mr. Tuttle's teaching load to one section of ethics and would have another professor at the college monitor his courses. Afterward, the dean wrote, he would determine whether Mr. Tuttle would be teaching in the spring of 2004.

Mr. Tuttle went on to teach the ethics course last fall, but he said that he was never monitored. He said he had watched as part-time instructors with less seniority were offered the philosophy and religion courses that he normally taught. Mr. Tuttle was offered up to three sections of logic, but he declined to teach them, saying he had little expertise or interest in the subject.

Mr. Tuttle said that an Orthodox rabbi and a nun who wears a habit teach at Lakeland. "If the idea is to disguise people's religion, they are at the very least applying it in an arbitrary way," said Jeffrey A. Brauer, Mr. Tuttle's lawyer.

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