NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

University of San Diego faculty demand reversal of theologian's disinvite

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 8, 2012

More than 100 faculty members at the University of San Diego have presented their president with an ultimatum: Reinstate a canceled visiting fellowship for a British theologian or face potential public questioning of your capability to lead.

The faculty of the Catholic university's College of Arts and Sciences made the move Tuesday in response to president Mary Lyons' cancellation of a fellowship for Tina Beattie, a theologian known for her work in contemporary ethical issues.

Beattie was scheduled to begin a fellowship at the university's Frances G. Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture on Tuesday. Lyons, who alleges the theologian publicly dissented from church teaching by suggesting Catholics could support civil same-sex marriage, canceled the appointment [1] in an Oct. 27 letter.

In a meeting of their academic assembly Tuesday, the University of San Diego faculty agreed to ask Lyons to reinstate Beattie's appointment immediately or face a possible vote of no confidence in her leadership.

Carlton Floyd, the chair of the assembly's executive committee, said in an interview Wednesday that the move was "exceptionally important."

"The will of the faculty has made it very clear that they consider this matter a matter of extreme importance and a matter that requires our immediate attention," said Floyd, an associate professor of English at the university.

While Floyd said the official count of the vote was not yet available, he said the vote was "overwhelmingly" in favor of the move. Another faculty member present at the meeting put the tally at 117 in favor, two against and three abstaining.

Floyd said the faculty agreed to meet again next week to reconsider the matter and any possible response from Lyons. Although Floyd said he wasn't sure what the faculty would do next, he said a vote of no confidence in Lyons' leadership is "definitely on the table."

University representatives were not immediately available to comment Thursday morning on the faculty vote.

In a statement to *NCR* on Monday, Lyons said Beattie's signature on an August letter in *The Times* of London -- one of 27 -- that said it would be "perfectly proper" for Catholics to support civil marriage for same-sex couples was the primary reason for her cancelation of the fellowship.

"It is significant that she signed the letter as a 'theologian,' " Lyons wrote in the statement. "This action is materially different from the exercise of scholarship and teaching appropriate to the role of an academic and whose freedom to do so I consistently defend."

Lyons' move, which came after pressure [2] from a conservative watchdog group backed by a high-ranking Vatican official, sparked wide-ranging criticism from academics in the U.S. and the U.K. who say the cancellation of Beattie's fellowship represents a stifling of academic freedom.

The 47,000-member American Association of University Professors, which rates universities on their protection of academic freedom, said in a letter [3] Monday that the situation raises "serious issues."

The University of San Diego's College of Arts and Sciences, one of seven colleges and schools at the university, lists about 212 faculty members. Academic assembly meetings, which normally occur once a month during the academic year, are open to all tenure and tenure-track faculty in the college, Floyd said.

The faculty vote Tuesday came hours after about 170 faculty and students protested the cancellation of Beattie's fellowship outside the university's main administration building.

One visiting faculty member has resigned his position at the university in a sign of solidarity with the theologian.

Michael Davis, a professor at the University of California, Riverside who had accepted a visiting fellowship at USD, announced his resignation in an email Nov. 2, which has since been made public on a Facebook page [4] supporting Beattie.

Davis, a member of Riverside's creative writing department who was expected to take up the USD's Knapp Chair of Liberal Arts in January, said he felt it necessary to forego the fellowship to be in solidarity with Beattie and "with the stand that's been taken by faculty and students."

"There's little to be said" about the resignation, Davis wrote in his email forgoing the post. "It's obvious that the University has been put under excruciating pressure by clerical reactionaries."

Terrence Tilley, the chair of the theology department at Fordham University, said in an interview Wednesday he thought Lyons might be "confused" about the relevance of Beattie's signature on the August letter regarding same-sex marriage.

"Beattie doesn't dissent from doctrine," said Tilley, who is also the Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., Professor of Catholic Theology at Jesuit-run Fordham. "[Beattie] has just made a statement about the legitimacy of Catholics voting in favor of civil rights for people who want to marry people of the same sex."

"Of course, on moral grounds, the church finds this wrong," Tilley continued. "But that she has chosen to make a statement regarding politics means that she is not denying or opposing Catholic doctrine."

Regarding Lyons' claim Beattie's signature on the August letter is "materially different from the exercise of scholarship and teaching" of a theologian, Tilley agreed with the university president.

"Lyons' claim that this action is materially different from the exercise of scholarship and teaching is entirely correct," Tilley said. "But it's one of the things that scholars and teachers do. We also function as public intellectuals."

In its letter on the matter, the American Association of University Professors referenced similar concerns it raised about the university in 2009, when USD revoked an offer of an honorary chair position to Rosemary Radford Ruether, a prominent U.S. Catholic feminism scholar and theologian.

Referencing Beattie and Ruether's rescissions, Tilley said that "the only conclusion I can draw is that the University of San Diego has again showed its disdain for serious academic theological scholarship, at least if it's

done by women."

Floyd also portrayed Lyons' decision as opposed to allowing a diversity of viewpoints on campus.

"Diversity is the hallmark of education," he said. "If you can?t have opposing viewpoints, what exactly are you looking at if you can?t engage in dialog about those matters? What exactly does a university do??

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. His email address is **jmcelwee@ncronline.org**.]

The Next Step FORWARD [5]

DONATE NOW [5]

Enjoy this article?
Help support more like it by **donating today!** [5]

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2015 - 22:48*): http://ncronline.org/news/theology/university-san-diego-faculty-demands-reversal-theologians-disinvite

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/38406
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/38771
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/38766
[4] http://www.facebook.com/TorerosStandWithBeattie
[5] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/article-end