

May 2016



**PROTECT
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM
IN CANADA**

Dear Friend,

There are still places in the world where many fundamental human rights – including the freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and religion – are severely restricted. In such authoritarian states, a person's religious affiliation often disqualifies them from pursuing certain professions (in civil service or teaching, for example). We are often quick to condemn such countries.

In Canada, we take it for granted that we have the right to gather with like-minded people – whether in cultural associations, education organizations, places of worship, sports clubs, or political groups – without fear that our affiliations will adversely affect our employment opportunities. Further, we accept that each group has the right to establish rules and membership requirements that are aimed at attracting specific participants, and that we, in turn, each have the right to choose with whom we will associate.

This spring, the highest courts in Nova Scotia, Ontario and B.C. will be asked to decide whether their respective provincial law societies can stigmatize and exclude lawyers from practicing law in their provinces if they were educated at Trinity Western University (TWU), a privately funded, Christian university.

These law societies don't have any issues with TWU's proposed law program itself. They know that the university has a reputation for scholastic excellence, and that the proposed program meets the Federation of Canadian Law Societies' rigorous academic requirements.

Their objections stem from the fact that TWU is a Christian school. It was established to faithfully and diligently serve those who accept "the Bible as the divinely inspired, authoritative guide for personal and community life." It seeks to attract those who are committed to humbly submitting their thoughts and lives to God's Word as an expression of their faith. And it operates from a fervent desire that none should stumble in their faith journey while at TWU.

At this point, the law societies are already insinuating that lawyers who choose to live by God's perfect and unchanging laws *must* somehow be unfit to practice the law of the land.

**"All Scripture is
God-breathed and is useful
for teaching, rebuking,
correcting and training
in righteousness."**

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

What offends them even further is TWU's requirement that its students and staff abide by a biblically-informed "community covenant" that includes abstinence from certain behaviours while they are enrolled there. Specifically, they oppose TWU's requirement that students abstain from extra-marital sex. Note that this applies to *all students* – heterosexual *and* homosexual.

over please...

And now, we arrive at the heart of the issue – namely, that *TWU upholds the biblical definition of marriage as being “between one man and one woman.”*

TWU is well within its legal rights as a private, faith-based institution to do so. Nevertheless, the critics argue that this definition of marriage discriminates against LGBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) individuals who may feel dissuaded from studying law there. And yet, TWU has never refused admission to anyone based on sexual orientation nor encouraged discrimination of any kind against LGBT people. In fact, gay and lesbian students do attend TWU.

The law societies in Nova Scotia, Ontario and B.C. are demanding that TWU redefine its definition of marriage and its expectations around sexual intimacy in order for the law school to be approved. But what they’re demanding is tantamount to censoring the Bible itself!

And if TWU’s traditional view of marriage can be sufficient in itself to justify denying accreditation to its law school and excluding its graduates, would the same logic not result in the denial of accreditation to lawyers who attend any church (or any faith-based institution) that holds the same view? Will we soon be finding ourselves in a country where our religious affiliations will restrict us from pursuing certain professional careers in law, education, medicine, business, etc.?

The freedom of all Canadians to express, exercise, and associate on the basis of our faith is under attack. Professional accrediting agencies may not approve of the moral and religious positions of TWU, but our faith can not and should not be subjected to public validation. They should not have the authority to ban qualifying graduates from working in their profession, impose barriers, or create additional hurdles for them to qualify.

Because the stakes are so high, the EFC has been intervening in each provincial court case to defend our Constitutional right to freedom of religion. This spring, appeals are being heard across the country. The EFC intervened in the Nova Scotia hearing from April 6-8. And we will also be intervening at the hearings in the BC Court of Appeal June 1-3 and in the Ontario Court of Appeal June 6-8. It is very likely that all three cases will land before the Supreme Court of Canada within the next year or so.

As you know, legal interventions are costly. Your past gifts were critical in ensuring that the EFC was present at every step to defend our Constitutional right to freedom of religion. But the fight is not over on this and other fronts, and we greatly need your financial help in order to keep the momentum going forward. Our current fiscal year will end on May 31st. Will you prayerfully consider a gift to help fund our legal interventions?

Sincerely,



Bruce Clemenger
President

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