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## Houses of Worship

# Campus Collisions

By NAOMI SCHAEFER

**G**rinnell College in Iowa has no IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship -- at least not on campus. Because the group bans practicing homosexuals from leadership positions, the school in 1997 decided to "derecognize" the organization.

This is not an isolated incident. College administrators nationwide, armed with "nondiscrimination" policies, are insisting that religious groups allow any student to run for a leadership position, regardless of whether he subscribes to the group's beliefs.

Most notoriously, the Student Judiciary at Tufts University voted in April to derecognize the Tufts Christian Fellowship for refusing to let Julie Catalano, a practicing lesbian, run for one of the group's officer positions. A few weeks ago, a Tufts administrative committee overturned the decision on procedural grounds -- the Student Judiciary neglected to hold hearings. The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center at Tufts says it will push for hearings next fall.

Middlebury College in Vermont had a similar run-in when the leadership of the IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship there discussed potential officers for next year. "Someone pointed out that there might be an issue" with one of the candidates, says ICF adviser Kerra Struthers, because he thought "that homosexuality is OK in the eyes of God." A few months later the student filed a complaint with the college.

How did Middlebury respond? It held a meeting on "Religious Freedom vs. Civil Rights" that Phil Benoit, director of public affairs at Middlebury, says "was focused on asking the group to reconsider their actions and to be more open in their attitude toward gays." Ms. Struthers was told that the dean of students would decide by the end of the school year whether the group should be punished. That deadline has now come and gone.

Like the Middlebury group, Christian students at Ball State University in Indiana find themselves waiting anxiously. In 1998, the administration told all student groups that their constitutions must include a nondiscrimination clause. After repeatedly -- and fruitlessly -- asking for clarification, the Christian Student Foundation requested an exemption from the rule. That was last November. "I

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don't like having this hanging over our heads," explains senior campus minister Mark Pike. "If I get up and say that Christian belief says that sex belongs in heterosexual marriage, if I say that everything else is sin, and someone says they are offended by that, can they go file a nondiscrimination complaint?"

Ms. Struthers, Mr. Pike and Eric Otoo, who heads Grinnell's ICF, stress that anyone can attend their groups' meetings and participate in their discussions and events. And anyone who has sinned in the past but renounced such behavior is eligible for leadership. "We believe everyone has sinned," notes Mr. Pike.

But that kind of openness is not enough for the "nonjudgmental" ethos of today's campuses. Of course, most campus groups discriminate in some way or other. Baseball teams don't include paraplegics, campus newspapers don't have to publish bad writers and there are very few tone-deaf sopranos in college choruses. But religious groups are treated differently. Why? Because for many students and administrators, religion is just a menu of beliefs, among which one can pick and choose the personally meaningful ones. It isn't as rigorous as baseball.

Faced with derecognition, such groups must improvise. A couple of months ago, some Harvard students who could not get funding from the university for a proposed "Jesus week" (a series of events focusing campus attention on Christianity) found an untapped source of money: alumni. Former Harvard student Stephen Galebach told the Crimson that he was "impressed that today's undergrads have the courage to share their faith in Christ." An e-mail request brought in more than \$3,000 from alumni.

But the challenge is more than financial. Certain campus policies have the effect of questioning the legitimacy of religious belief, even if the administrators in charge of enforcing them will not say so outright. I asked Kay Bales, who oversees student groups at Ball State, whether she believes that Christian groups should be forced to allow homosexual leaders. "Obviously, I'm not going to give you a straight answer," she replied, honestly.

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*Ms. Schaefer is assistant editor of Commentary magazine.*

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