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CONTENTS

OPENING SALVOS

COVER STORY

NATIONAL

CULTURAL

CLOSING THOUGHTS

SEARCH

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## NATIONAL

### Rough and Tufts

*Christian student group on liberal campus  
accorded a little tolerance, but not without  
a lawyer and a fight*

By Bob Jones IV

In 1852, a band of Unitarian dissenters left Harvard to form their own college. Decrying the persecution they perceived, the Unitarians moved across town and founded the school that would come to be known as Tufts University.

Almost 150 years later, some Tufts students tried to harass a small group of dissenters within their own school. In April, a hastily convened student judiciary panel stripped an evangelical Bible study group of its status as an official campus organization. In addition to losing \$6,000 a year in funding, the evangelical students lost the right to recruit, advertise, notify members of meetings, or even call themselves the Tufts Christian Fellowship, the name they had used for 60 years.

The group was not being banned, the university pointed out magnanimously. Its members could still meet wherever they could find space; they simply couldn't reserve a regular meeting room on campus.

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But in the wake of bad publicity over political correctness and double standards, Tufts reversed itself. On May 16 a judicial review panel made up of faculty and students decided the original decision against TCF had been wrong, and the evangelical students were again granted full recognition.

Damage to the university's reputation for diversity and tolerance was already done, however. At issue was whether an openly lesbian student named Julie Catalano should be allowed to hold a leadership post in the fellowship. Ms. Catalano had been a welcome member of the group for three years, and had made no secret of her inclinations during that time. But when she announced she had accepted her sexuality-and subsequently that she desired a leadership role-her fellow members drew a line. Given their biblical understanding that homosexual practice is a sin, she could not be accepted as a leader.

Ms. Catalano took her case to the student government, which quickly ruled that Tufts Christian Fellowship had violated the university's nondiscrimination policy. The group hired a lawyer and appealed the decision, arguing that Ms. Catalano was barred from leadership because of her beliefs, not her sexuality. She was still welcome as a member, they said, but a religious group must be allowed to select leaders who share its core beliefs.

The rather obscure university with 8,000 students immediately found itself thrust into a national debate over clashing rights. Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, accused Tufts of religious bigotry, while Jennifer Levi of Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) insisted it was simply a matter of a university deciding what groups it wanted to fund.

A Philadelphia-based group called the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) led the charge nationally on behalf of the Christian students. It rounded up some 200 professors at 50 universities who decried the Tufts policy and pressed the case against bigotry in the media. Thor Halvorssen, executive director at FIRE, said the Tufts nondiscrimination policy amounted to a speech code-and that such codes are very selectively enforced.

"Students are persecuted for innocuous statements if they offend anyone on the left. But you'll never find a student being charged for having yelled 'born-again bigot' or 'Jesus freak' at a Christian student. These are terms that offend, but you'll never find a case where that results in disciplinary action.... It's an unbearable double standard."

Mr. Halvorsen said the Tufts definition of discrimination was completely unworkable and would lead to a loss of identity among all student groups. "It's like saying the gay group on campus cannot take into account the views of people standing for leadership. By their logic, a fundamentalist Muslim should be allowed to lead the gay student group."

Even though Tufts has backed off, such a policy may soon become reality at Middlebury College in Vermont, another institution that took on its evangelical student group over charges of anti-homosexual discrimination. The Middlebury administration is now weighing a rule that would explicitly prohibit all organizations-including religious ones-from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.

Mr. Halvorsen praised Tufts' reversal and hopes other schools will learn from the controversy: "We are delighted and relieved that the TCF does not have to seek shelter in catacombs beneath the Tufts campus. This is a victory for everyone who values genuine pluralism. Tufts has stepped back, for now at least, from the immorality of a double standard that would have forced the TCF to violate its own beliefs in voting for officers."

Curtis Chang, an affiliate chaplain at Tufts and leader of the evangelical group, said he was "ecstatic and overjoyed" by the ruling. "I feel like it's a victory not just for Christians at Tufts, but for the whole Tufts campus. It's to their benefit to have genuine religious freedom and to have Christians on their campus.... We just want to continue to bless the university and share the gospel with those in it."

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