

## Response To The Concerned Gordon Parents Letter

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Blessings to you as we jointly prepare to navigate through a new semester at Gordon College. We remain committed to making the campus experience as safe and fulfilling as possible, and College leaders at all levels continue to take a prayerful and prudent approach to decisions made on behalf of all our students.

To that end, I appreciate your commitment to your students and to Gordon, and respect the intent behind sharing your grievances in this way. While we would expect that you have or will continue to work directly with Gordon's leadership team, speaking for the Board—many of whom are alumni or past and current parents of Gordon students—we understand the personal experiences shared are painful and the underlying concern about the climate at Gordon—or the College's broader direction and how it affects your son or daughter—is worrisome enough for you to reach out to trustees directly.

This week at our winter meeting, the Board took substantial time to review and deliberate on your message as a group. You need to know that the Board's position with respect to assessing and reacting to the culture's ideological and social issues is to begin with God's Word. Here are a few foundational Biblical principles to which we adhere. By grace and faith, fallen humanity is reconciled to God through the sacrificial and completed work of Christ who died on the cross as our propitiation and substitute and having reconciled believers to God, we are each also reconciled to each other. (Eph. 2:11-22). As the Apostle Paul clearly explains, God has created a new people in Christ out of former enemies—Jews and Gentiles, meaning the rest of all humanity. Apostle John in Revelation could not make this point clearer in recording the worship hymn that the “Lamb was slain and, by His blood, ransomed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and he made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 4:9-10). Being one people in Christ, Christ commands us to love each other as He has loved us, giving up His life to save us from the wrath of God for our sins—a sacrificial and steadfast love not mere sentiment. (John 13:34). Christ commands that we are to forgive one another for wrongs done against us by a brother, seventy-seven times per day if need be. (Matt. 28:21-22). Each person will be judged for the sins he has committed—not that of his “fathers” (meaning authoritative heads, leaders, rulers, etc. – not biological “father”) even if the sins of the fathers have multigenerational consequences. (Ezekiel 18:1-32). Finally, if we love Christ, we obey His commandments. (John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-6). There is much more to say but space does not allow me to give more examples. Please understand that our understanding of these passages is orthodox, traditional, and conservative. Thus, our love of Christ and His word is the lens through which we view the various ideological and social issues.

With that as background, we want you to know that we have heard clearly, and take seriously, your concerns. Gordon has always been unique in New England, and we are deeply committed to

protecting its place as a Christ-honoring lighthouse in this part of the world. It would not be appropriate for the Board to comment publicly on individual situations raised but rest assured that we did engage in robust conversation with the President's Cabinet around many of the specific items your letter raised. I hope that you can understand that given the sensitivities and complexities involved in addressing your concerns, communicating with the President would have been the better way to express your concerns. Please, going forward, communicate with the President before coming to the Board, which properly defers to management when possible, as is the role of all boards of trustees.

In a number of areas (especially regarding events or decisions that took place months—and in some cases, years—ago), the Board is satisfied with steps that have been taken to ensure similar circumstances do not arise in the future. In others, the Board asked the President's Cabinet to take additional steps, which they have agreed to do. We sincerely apologize for failures of the College, known or unknown, over the last several months. All of us—Trustees, the President, and his Cabinet—understand the seriousness of caring thoughtfully for all within the College community. Through Christ we can, and will, do better.

I also want to apologize for the difficulties many students may have experienced in a very volatile fall semester. It is important to recognize that we do believe a portion of the body of Christ at Gordon – our students of color – is hurting more than others. As such, we have committed time and resources to improving in the campus experience that takes into consideration the concerns they have shared directly with us, and will continue to do so. Yet we know this work will fail if it does not encompass all students. It is important to all Trustees that every student have a voice at the table, and that they are treated with respect and dignity, even when they hold convictions that seem counter to those held by others.

Some of this work has already begun, and other pieces of it will begin in earnest in the months ahead. President Lindsay will be sharing more with the community around some of the specifics of how we are seeking to achieve greater *Shalom* among our community early next week. This work does include some of the items you raise in your letter, and President Lindsay will be able to speak to those in more detail when he writes next week. His communication will go to all Gordon stakeholders as it is important the community hears the same information consistently.

Speaking for the Trustees, we want to be as clear as possible on this central point: as a Christian institution, our frame of reference at Gordon is not humanist or political or secular philosophy, nor will it ever be. We stand upon the biblical teaching that the root of hatred, bigotry and disharmony is the fallen nature of humankind, redeemed only through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. That has been true since 1889 and remains true of us today.

As we move forward this semester, we need to remind everyone in the community—all students, as well as faculty and staff— what unites us in Christ. We need to learn how to engage that well in a way that does not denigrate God's image in the other. In the emotion and volatility of the moment this past fall, I think it is fair to say that was not done as well as we expect for the future. We sincerely apologize for that and will do better. Striving to do better in this space is a charge that the Board has placed upon Student Life, and one they have recommitted themselves to

wholeheartedly. At the same time, we are calling them to the kind of civil discourse and dialogue that we have always expected from the extended Gordon family and that befits a community that claims the name of Christ. I trust you are willing to make the same commitment.

Simply stated, there is a reality we face as a College, and which is true on other campuses and wider society. These are issues and conflicts that are not going away—they will be found on other campus, and even within our churches and communities. As such it serves Gordon well to deal with them proactively and productively. Where better than a place like Gordon? The idea of actively engaging—rather than skirting—topics, ideas and issues that may be challenging to a Christian worldview, but examined within the framework of our Christian faith, has been a hallmark of a Gordon education for decades. As an alum, I testify that perhaps the most essential part of my Gordon education was learning to assess and analyze non-Christian ideologies, philosophies, concepts, principles, practices, cultural shifts, world views through a solidly Biblical lens and to do so with grace. Of course, it is not going to be a perfect process, and at times even well-intentioned actions might fall short of their objective. Our hope is we can all work together toward common ground and common purpose as Christ followers.

Through Christ's providence, we hope all of our students will see us do better – not just through word, but action – in the months ahead. Speaking for my fellow Trustees, I truly hope that you and your family will remain alongside us in this important work, helping show the world the strength of the fellowship of believers and a willingness, always, to rejoin arms in service to Christ.

Peace to you,

Herman J. Smith, Jr. '70

Chair, Gordon College Board of Trustees

Preparing the People of God for the Word of God. – A.J. Gordon