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Dear Louisiana Baptists:

Recently I read an article by Billy Graham in which he wrote, "It is only the Christian who refuses to compromise in matters of honesty, integrity and morality that is bearing an effective witness for Christ." It is with this truth in mind that I reluctantly feel compelled to write this letter. The growing mismanagement of funds, lack of concern for faculty, fear tactics, and moral ambiguities at Louisiana College force me to write this letter to make you aware of what is happening at your college.

I first came to Louisiana College in the fall of 2007 to head the Art Department. I arrived with great enthusiasm. I had been told of the strong academic tradition at LC and was very encouraged by the narrative about how advocates of a conservative theological position had wrestled the school back from secularists. To me, this sort of spiritual victory was exciting and made me eager to participate in the stated goal of building LC into a preeminent Christian college. As a conservative Christian in a largely secular field, I was eager to participate in what God was doing on campus. I even turned down a better paying job at a higher ranked Christian institution near my family to come and be a part of what was happening at Louisiana College.

We hit the ground running in that first year and developed an ambitious vision for the Art Department. The first step was to redesign the curriculum including the addition of professional level Bachelors of Fine Arts (BFA) degrees in both studio and visual communications. These additions made LC one of only thirteen evangelical schools in the nation to offer BFA degrees in Studio Art and one of only six evangelical schools to offer an BFA in Visual Communications or the related fields of Graphic and Web Design. As a department we also developed a travel program to expose our students to quality art in centers such as New York, Houston, Dallas and New Orleans. We modernized the department's computer labs (finally obtaining legal software), added a printmaking studio, and outfitted the woodshop.

In addition to my work in developing the department, I was one of eight professors from the United States to be selected by the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity to participate in a seminar in Indonesia which has resulted in a national (potentially

international) traveling exhibition entitled *Charis*. As a part of the *Charis* exhibition, I was Louisiana College's only representative at the Council of Christian Colleges and University's International Forum on Christian Higher Education in 2010. I was twice awarded faculty development grants which helped me produce the work necessary for the 23 exhibitions across the country (eight solo exhibitions) which I have participated in while a faculty member at LC.

However, despite my enthusiasm and hard work for Louisiana College, I found myself increasingly troubled by the behavior of the college.

What concerns me most is the spiritual condition of the campus. I came to Louisiana College because I am a conservative Southern Baptist who dearly loves God and who believes desperately in the importance of quality Christian higher education. Yet, what I have encountered at LC is anything but spiritual health. All of my education took place in secular schools. Most of my undergraduate education and all of my graduate education was at a renowned art school in New York City. I have spent my life in the combat zone seeking to engage the world for Christ. Yet, I have never been as persecuted for my faith as I have been at LC. I believe that an integral aspect of Biblical Christianity is a commitment to Truth. In fact, the very gospel hinges on the Biblical narrative's truth. If we are to love Christ, who is the Truth and the Way, we must have a love for truth. However, it breaks my heart that this commitment to truth is not what I find at LC. I see a culture of "spin" and compromised integrity. There is a spirit of fear among the faculty and students which is wholly inconsistent with our God who does not give a spirit of fear.

My first concern with the college arose when I heard that faculty members typically do not receive cost of living raises. In fact, I had a faculty member laugh out loud when I mentioned keeping up with inflation. Since that time, I have discovered that the faculty has only received two three percent raises in the last eleven years. While this was shocking, I also understood that the college had gone through a serious change in direction, precipitated by doctrinal convictions with which I agree. So, I was willing to sacrifice. My children and the children of many other faculty members are reliant upon Medicaid and our wives are without insurance, but no one goes into Christian higher education to gain wealth. So while the sacrifices are hard, all things can be endured for the cause of Christ. It was, however, disconcerting to later see in the public record that the college President's salary climbed 31.2% from \$125,000 (2006-07 academic year) to \$164,000 (2007-08), then 9.2% to \$179,159 (2008-09), and finally 6.5% to the most recent publically disclosed salary of \$190,813 (2009-10). All of these raises occurred in years where the college faculty received no raises. I struggle to reconcile how a conservative Christian leader who knows his faculty is among the lowest paid in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (88<sup>th</sup> out of 106) and who knows he has faculty members who are reliant on public aid can take over \$65,000 in raises for himself without ensuring raises for the under paid in his employ.

The issue which first bothered many of my colleagues on the faculty was the financial decisions which the college was making. The construction of the football stadium with

borrowed money was very disconcerting to faculty when they knew the sore state of repairs in the library and dorms (which have habitual leaks in the roof) to name just two of the facility deficiencies on the campus. The cost to repair the campus (\$35 million) rivals if not exceeds the value of the campus, if the recent Aramark report commissioned by the college is to be believed. Even if the Aramark document is over stated, the facility needs on the campus amount to millions. It seemed like gross mismanagement to many on the faculty to spend millions on a stadium when the campus is in such disrepair. Despite that common complaint, I know the importance athletics can play for a campus. I played basketball in college and chose my school in no small part because they offered a basketball program when many elite art institutions did not. However, the stadium is still unfinished, several multi-million dollar campaigns have been launched to add additional collegiate programming, yet the basic needs of the college go unaddressed. Even in the art department, we operate without proper ventilation; in fact, most rooms have no ventilation. We have even had students get sick from this issue. But to this date, ventilation has not been adequately addressed by the administration.

Concerns about the academic quality at LC have also risen over a few short years. When I interviewed with LC, we reported to the US News that the middle 50% of our student's ACT scores fell within the 19-26 range. However, that quickly dropped to 17-24, which is a dramatic drop. I have heard consistent complaints from faculty who teach core classes to freshman about the staggering drop in student quality over the last few years. In my own department, we have dealt with a majority of students who are not ready to complete college level work, including one student who was diagnosed with mild mental retardation. While this is not what I was told LC was seeking to become, I understand the benefit of extending the college opportunity to students who are under prepared. But if that is to be the college's focus, we then have the moral responsibility to provide writing centers and effective helps to such students, which is something we do not currently provide in an effective way.

Sadly, the lack of academic rigor is being noticed by the student body. I have had students in other departments complain to me that they desire to go to graduate school yet feel they are not learning adequately. Regularly, the students discuss courses which are so easy that they feel they are not getting the education for which they are paying. One student told me of a course where the class only covered three of ten chapters in the syllabus. Faculty members have complained about being pressured to lower the standards of their courses and fearing the repercussion of giving poor grades to students who are not able to handle the course content. Some have even received pressure from administration officials to change grades. I have additionally been told of faculty members who routinely have taken classes to sing Karaoke and of others who change athlete's grades simply because they are athletes.

As I saw things which concerned me at LC, I at least took solace in our President's ability to build a department. His biography on the website states, "Under Aguiard's leadership, the Division of Education grew more than 500 percent, leading the nation in percentage of growth." However, the college Fact Books state that the Division of Education's

enrollment when he took his position in 2000 was 184 students and when he left the Division Chair for the Presidency in 2005 was 188 students. We have also seen “spin” in the reporting of the US News rankings. When I interviewed, LC was ranked 30<sup>th</sup> among baccalaureate colleges in the South. Over the last few years, LC has quickly dropped to 49<sup>th</sup>. However, in a press release last year the college implied that we were ranked against over 300 colleges nationally. This fallacy was again put forward by the President on the radio this academic year. The truth is that LC is ranked 49 out of only 96 small southern colleges. While these facts are individually disturbing, they represent a much larger culture of dishonesty at Louisiana College. Most of the college’s deceptions are much more subtle and not as easily documented, but they are seen by many. It grieves me to see the cumulative effect this environment has on LC students. They see the lack of quality and the prevailing dishonesty as an indictment of Christ. There are some who gain strength in their faith through relationships with other believing students or with faculty who thoughtfully impact their lives, but many see LC as a place of academic mediocrity and spiritual cancer.

The level of fear at LC is such that students are told by their family to not raise health concerns related to facilities out of concern that they may not actually be granted their degrees. Meanwhile, faculty members shake their heads silently for fear of losing their jobs, many choosing to leave quietly after just a year or two. The rhetoric about loyalty from the presidency towards the faculty has become feverish over the last year. At our last faculty meeting we were told that loyalty and honesty are at the heart of LC and then immediately told about two staff members who were recently fired for disloyal acts. What happens when loyalty and honesty are at odds? Is the faculty to choose loyalty to LC over honesty? The rhetoric has reached such a pitch that dissenting opinions from faculty members have been called “poison” and articles in the *Town Talk* which are not glowingly supportive of the College have been deemed “evil” and “attacks from Satan” by the President himself.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, I was notified that I will not be receiving a contract next academic year. The only reasons given in the meeting for my termination were that “I want you and your family to be happy and I don’t think that is going to be here” and it had been heard that “you might be looking [for other employment] anyway.” I was further told in the meeting that “I know you are a professional and that you are also a Christian.” Given the disjunction between my termination, the stated reasons, and the following compliments to my professionalism and faith, I can only assume that my efforts to confront dishonesty and push for morally transparent behavior were viewed as disloyal and resulted in my termination. Even at that, the college violated its normal procedure of letting faculty members, such as me with three or more years of service, know they will not have their contracts renewed by January 15<sup>th</sup>. By mid-February when I was notified, virtually all academic positions have already been advertised and filled. The need to punish presumed disloyalty, even if the disloyalty was actually a greater loyalty to Christ, superseded normal procedure and may well leave my family of seven unemployed without our sole source of income. This termination did not transpire because I violated any published tenant of the college or behaved in a way inconsistent with the Christian faith or

Baptist tradition, but rather because my pursuit for truth was seen to be at odds with the administration. My Division Chair had not been notified that I would not be allowed to return until I told him a week later, which underscores that this move had nothing to do with job performance. I have sought only to honor Christ. I have not stolen private documents from the college nor had sexual relationships with students as were the cases with recent firings and resignations. Yet, those sins were rewarded with six months of compensation past their end of employment.

In all of this, my great pain is that I believe LC is taking the Lord's name in vain. John MacArthur has written, "To use God's name in such a way as to bring disrepute upon his character or deeds [is] to irreverently misuse His name." Is that not what we do at LC when we claim all we do is for Christ yet do it without integrity, quality, or discernment? Are we not taking the Lord's name in vain when we claim that others of faith who disagree with us are "poison" or that media reports which are based on our internal documents are "attacks from Satan?" When we see leaders rewarding themselves and neglecting their employees or falsehoods being propagated as truth in the name of Christ, are we truly honoring Him? When we set forth lofty plans about multi-million dollar programs yet neglect the basic health and safety of students already entrusted to us, are we bringing Him glory? When our works prefer to be hidden rather than known publically, are we illustrating that "he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:21)?

The Louisiana College community is a group of believers who proclaim to stand for a conservative theology and claim to show our loving Christ to the world. I am passionate about the LC that I was recruited to serve: an LC that is academically excellent and honors Christ in word and deed. But, that is not the LC I have experienced. My greatest concern is that the Louisiana Baptist and Louisiana College communities are either filled with apathy or a lack of discernment. I fear that there will be those in our communities who will stand in judgment before Christ and be required to explain why they tolerated His name being taken in vain. For those who tolerate it, I pray they have an answer. But, mostly I pray that we do not tolerate it, that we stand now and say He is my Lord and my God and I will not let His name go undefended.

In Christ,

Rondall Reynoso