

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

An address by Carl J. Friedrich

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Academic freedom has never been adequately recognized in the United States, as it has in Europe. It has often been misinterpreted by its friends as primarily the right of tenure. It has been erroneously related to freedom of speech. But freedom of speech is basically political in its justification; without it there can be no free elections, no political life. Academic freedom has only an indirect relation with the political arena. Its true home is with the freedom of religion, ever the most sacred of the freedoms of the Western world. A professor is, by his very title, a man who professes. What does he profess? The truth as he sees it. Not Hitler's or Stalin's truth, and not the truth of the Congress or even the American people either. His truth finding is entitled to the same respect to which the truth professing of the minister of religion is entitled. Both speak, or ought to speak, write and study with a sole eye to what they believe to be the truth. Their teaching must be so indubitably inspired by their conviction of what is the truth that in the discussion with doubting students all the evidence which is relevant can be marshalled without fear or favor. But such religious freedom to teach has as its correlative the freedom to learn. Unless the student is free to pursue the truth wherever it will lead him, he cannot take advantage of the teaching I have described. The relation is the same as that between the minister and his congregation.

What I have said does not, of course, touch in any way the question of what either teacher or student may do outside the academic walls. They are, and I am sure, almost all want to be responsible citizens. It has been one of the sources of trouble endangering academic freedom that certain individuals have presumed that such freedom gives them a privileged position in the political arena. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I have done, when I have participated in public life, e.g. in assisting American military government in Germany, or advising the government of Puerto Rico on their constitution, is not covered by my freedom as an academic



teacher. I am responsible for it in a strictly political way, like every other man who might have done these things instead of me. Clashes with the law are even more obviously outside the ken of academic freedom.

What is the deeper reason for the development of academic freedom as a basic freedom in Western nations? I believe it is basically the same as that for religious freedom. They are both deeply rooted in the Judaeo-Christian belief in the dignity of man. The dignity of man calls for respect on the part of everybody, including popular majorities in democracies, for the convictional core of each and every member of society. For the average man, this convictional core is represented by his religious faith. For the man of science and scholarship, it is represented by scientific and scholarly truth; so it is for his students and fellow workers in research offices and the like. There is no real "explanation" of such a faith. You can point to its antiquity, its utility, its "democratic" quality; fundamentally one comes back to the underlying religious foundation. Thus an attack upon academic freedom is an attack upon one of the main supports of our entire culture. It is, I am convinced, unconstitutional. The Supreme Court has not dealt with the issue to any extent. In the past it has not been raised. It may now have to be. I am well aware that anyone who speaks of something as unconstitutional before the Supreme Court has spoken is treading uncertain ground. But the Supreme Court has been very staunch in its defense of religious freedom; it has tended <sup>To</sup> (by) take a broad view of its meaning and significance. I hope that if the issue arises, it will recognize the relation between religious and academic freedom. The common ground is respect for conviction, based upon faith and honest intellectual labor. It is in no way affected by wars, whether cold or hot, because such convictions, operative in the realm of thought and discussion, never can constitute a clear and present danger. Even if one were willing to admit that the search for truth could be dangerous in the short run, - and some good people think so, - it can never be in the long run. "The truth will make you free."



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