

Churchill's Response to the Attack on Free Speech

The mission of the Churchill Club, simply put, is to read books and to confront ideas that we believe to be underrepresented in the Trinity College curriculum. In no way are we seeking to limit or suppress the discussion of other ideas – in fact, the suppression of other ideas is incompatible with our desire for free and open inquiry.

To achieve our mission, we have two main activities: reading groups and guest speakers, the latter because again we see the lecture series and guest speakers on campus as one-sided. The reading groups are headed by an astute scholar and are open to anyone to join. Furthermore, we seek to bring in well-regarded academic speakers, not inflammatory ideologues.

Many other colleges and universities have organizations very similar to our plan for Churchill. These other organizations include the Witherspoon Institute at Princeton, the Abigail Adams Institute at Harvard, the Elm Institute and the William F. Buckley Jr. Program at Yale, and the Daniel Webster Project at Dartmouth. It would be a positive step for Trinity to follow suit of these renowned institutions.

In a school-wide email on the 2018 election day, President Berger-Sweeney wrote, “Today, let us all recommit to our core values as a liberal arts college—diversity, inclusion, freedom of expression, fact-based discussions, and civil dialogue across differences of opinion.” Clearly the College has not followed this commitment as the treatment of the Churchill Club has been an affront to these values.

Furthermore, we do not recognize the right of a small minority to constitute themselves as an inquisition to which we must submit. We want and deserve the same treatment that every other group on campus receives. But the Churchill Club is open to the possibility of a public forum *after* we are approved by SGA. Ideally, the Churchill event would consist of panel discussions stemming from written interrogatories of both sides on the place of studying Western Civilization.

We have, since our inception, been upset at the double standard we have endured. The Administration has responded quickly and publicly when it feels that something has threatened “community” at Trinity. We, on the other hand have suffered repeated acts of vandalism, destruction of fliers, and on and on that we have reported. Our concerns have repeatedly been met with silence by the President and Vice President for Student Affairs.

And we have been forced to endure an ugly campaign of rumors and mud being slung at the wall hoping some would stick. This has consisted of everything from being anti-Semitic to channeling “dark money.” As we have many Jewish participants and Senior Fellows who are Jewish those charges are non-sense. As to the apparent fear of the Koch Foundation, unfortunately we have been informed along with similar Institutes that Koch is no longer funding liberal arts initiatives rather than “skills.”

Finally, while the Churchill Club’s parent Institute, a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational foundation, will remain “offshore” to preserve its limited funds from College “service charges,” a situation true for all the Institutes mentioned above, if we are given housing on campus, as with

the Greenberg Center, we will pass funds through the Development Office for a Churchill Center that will be open to everyone of every persuasion for open discussion.

The issue is simple: does Trinity believe in free speech, or are its public statements pure hypocrisy?

The Students and Faculty of Churchill