

The Gordon College Case

Case Name: *Gordon College, et al. v. Margaret DeWeese-Boyd*

Case Action: Cert. petition filed on August 2, 2021

Significance: Whether the government can dictate who teaches a religious college's faith.



Background: Gordon College is committed to the spiritual growth of its students, and the primary people through which Gordon College models the faith for those students are professors. One of Gordon's professors sued after she did not receive a desired promotion, and the College defended by arguing that it alone must have the authority to make hiring, firing, and promotion decisions about employees who inculcate the College's Christian faith. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court disagreed because this particular professor did not take students to religious services or lead them in prayer. But the First Amendment and recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions make it clear that a religious institution is free to choose who fulfill its mission. The government should not interfere with how religious colleges select their faculty since professors are the primary way that colleges model the faith to students. Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys represent Gordon College and have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case and protect religious liberty for colleges everywhere.

Key Facts

- Gordon College has maintained its dedication to the historic, evangelical, biblical faith and determines the effectiveness of its faculty in large part by the integration and expression of their Christian faith in their teaching and scholarship.
- Students choose to attend Gordon College because they want to integrate their faith and learning. They want to learn and ultimately practice their vocational disciplines through a Christian lens.
- The First Amendment is clear: The government has no business telling a religious college how to exercise its faith. That includes how a religious college makes decisions about employees who are expected to transmit, carry, and advance the College's Christian beliefs and mission.

Key Points

- Gordon College's faith is public—the school's statement of faith and student life and conduct guidelines are all available freely online.
- In the context of elementary schools, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Our Lady of Guadalupe* that "The religious education and formation of students is the very reason for the existence of most private religious schools." The same principle applies to religious colleges.
- Both church and state benefit when the state is not second-guessing the internal decisions of who a religious organization selects to teach the faith.

The Bottom Line: Gordon College should be free to decide who can best pass on its faith to its students without government intervention.