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Theologian, Radforth Ruether, disinvented at U of San Diego

by Tom Roberts by NCR Staff

Rosemary Radforth Ruether, the noted Catholic theologian who was disinvented as



a lecturer by the University of San Diego, said she was "saddened by this

experience and concerned about what it means for academic freedom at the university.

Ruether, who writes a regular column for NCR, was invited in January to occupy the Msgr. John R. Portman Chair in Roman Catholic Systematic Theology for the fall 2009 semester to lecture on theology and ecology. After negotiating details of the appointment, which included an expectation that she would make herself "reasonably available" while on campus to "counsel and encourage theology faculty," give a public lecture and seminars and colloquia for the faculty, she received an official confirmation on April 30.

Ruether, in answer to a question, submitted to NCR a written explanation of her dealings with the University of San Diego. She said the university announced the appointment in June, about the same time that she received "an indication from one friend that hostile response was being expressed by conservative

Catholic groups, one of whom accused me of teaching that 'God is Gaia,' a view which I do not take.?

She said she wasn't surprised when the university provost called in mid-July canceling the offer. 'She [the provost] said that the donor funding the chair had a 'certain vision' of who she wanted for the chair,' Ruether wrote. 'I added 'and this is not my vision.' 'Yes,' she said.?

In response to press inquiries, the university released a statement saying that upon review 'of the specific purpose' of the Msgr. John R. Portman Chair, the university 'is no longer considering the appointment' of Ruether as the 2009-2010 chair holder.

A new appointment will be made in the near future, the university said.

University spokesperson Pamela Gray Payton said she could not add any details to why Ruether's invitation was rescinded, but she confirmed that the university had received calls from Catholics upset at the appointment.

Some urged a reversal of the university decision or threatened action against the university. However, she said she did not believe that the calls were the reason for reversing the earlier invitation. Instead, she said, it is 'fairly clear the expectation' of the donor, whose name was not released, is that 'the speaker would be someone whose theology or teaching were pretty much in concert with that of the church.?

Payton also said the recent decision 'has certainly highlighted' the fact that the university doesn't have 'a very reliable process for discussing or vetting or deciding upon endowed chairs.?

In their correspondence, Ruether said, she made it clear that she would not be able to take the position full time. 'I was retired, had a standing offer to teach at Claremont, did not need another job and was making a special effort to respond to this offer.' Currently she has a contract through 2011 to teach at Claremont Graduate University and Claremont School of Theology, which describes itself as an ecumenical and interfaith institution.

Ruether said she does not wish 'to restore this cancelled offer. But I am very saddened by this experience and concerned about what it means for academic freedom at the University of San Diego and, by implication, about the state of academic freedom at Catholic colleges generally.?

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(Editor's Note: Readers may be interested in a column by NCR web columnist Clarissa Pinkola Estés responding to this news story: [The pope and La Curandera, the Healer.](#))

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