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Open letter regarding Professor Douglas Farrow

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Our open letter regarding Professor Douglas Farrow:

[resources for students and a link to the Google document version of this statement with hyperlinks are below]

To the School of Religious Studies—

We are writing to you today to express concern over publications and comments made by Professor Douglas B. Farrow, a theology professor within the School of Religious Studies (SRS), which we feel are both troubling and exclusionary. Dr. Farrow has been employed at McGill's SRS since 1997, before many of SRS's students were even born. During that time, many students of the McGill community have deemed Dr. Farrow's academic approach and perspectives on gender and sexuality as creating exclusionary and unsafe environments in his classes for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Dr. Farrow teaches Principles of Christian Theology 2 (RELG 434) and Theological Ethics (RELG 470) in the Fall semester and is currently teaching Principles of Theology 1 (RELG 333) and Christian Thought and Culture (RELG 334) during the Winter semester. Three of these courses are required for the Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) program and the topics of these classes are of interest to many Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) students in the SRS. The fact that Dr. Farrow teaches three mandatory classes is of great concern to the student body, as we would hope that both McGill and the SRS prioritize the wellbeing of their marginalized students.

Many of Dr. Farrow's publications are on display in the Birks lobby, of which [*Nation of Bastards: Essays on the End of Marriage*](#), we feel, is particularly troubling. In this book, Dr. Farrow refers to same-sex marriage as a "casualty" that has reduced both the institution of marriage as well as the family. He writes that "same-sex marriage makes bastards of us all," which "marks an important milestone on the path to state tyranny." It is difficult to read this quotation without immediately perceiving it as a deliberate homophobic attack, which he reiterates in his article "[*Happy Canada Day, Bastards!*](#)", written in reaction to the landmark Supreme Court decision in the United States legalizing gay marriage.

Dr. Farrow continues his arguments against gay marriage in [*Desiring a Better Country*](#). In [*Theological Negotiations*](#), he asserts that he "[uses] gendered language freely" because "God made 'man' male and female." This rhetoric is exclusionary to transgender and gender-nonconforming students. It

makes members of the LGBTQ+ community feel unsafe in and marginalized by the SRS and severely undermines the inclusivity of both the SRS and McGill at large.

Dr. Farrow's publications are just the beginning of his outward displays of bigoted views. In 2017, he was a panellist on the topic of "Gender Mainstreaming and Transgender," which was [protested by a group of transgender students](#) from QPIRG, Queer McGill, and the Union for Gender Empowerment. The subject of the talk became a webpage called "[Gender Mainstreaming](#)" as a part of a website run by Dr. Farrow titled "Pluralism, Religion, and Public Policy" hosted by the McGill website. This page discussed gender transition with outrageous comments such as "Dave the Rapist can return as Renée the ravishing." The website has since been taken down by the McGill administration at the request of a concerned individual, however these views were permitted by both the School and the University to be published and continue to be espoused by him within the SRS.

While many of Dr. Farrow's publications were published a number of years ago, it was only in recent years that McGill has begun to facilitate safe and open discourse on topics such as gender identity and sexual orientation, with initiatives such as the "[It Takes All of Us](#)" campaign. As student representatives, we have taken upon ourselves this academic year to support our LGBTQ+ students as much as possible, through initiatives such as creating gender neutral washrooms in Birks. Our work would be incomplete if we did not extend this to the classrooms, and as such, we now find it necessary to voice our concerns.

From an academic standpoint, we are concerned by Dr. Farrow's narrow approach to his teaching, in which he permits and validates a limited number of perspectives while belittling most others. Based on his course readings, Dr. Farrow provides his students with a very particular perspective both on Christian theology and Christian understanding of gender and sexuality, which not only prevents a diverse learning environment, but also makes numerous students feel victimized by many of the views expressed by Dr. Farrow.

This alone is cause for concern, but even more than these methodological issues, the perspectives, opinions, and identities that Dr. Farrow deliberately excludes and denigrates are in direct violation of McGill's Principles of Equality and Inclusivity, McGill's Policy on Harassment and Discrimination bylaw, SSMU's Equity Policy, and SSMU's Academic Accessibility Policy. These policies and laws ensure the protection of all individuals within the McGill community and, as such, must be upheld and promoted in practice, not just in writing.

In all four of his syllabi for the 2019-2020 academic year, such as the [RELG 333 syllabus](#), Dr. Farrow refers to his policy regarding "PFNP," [McGill's Preferred First Name Policy](#). In Dr. Farrow's policy, he states that "[no] one is required to adopt views, claims, or linguistic forms with which they disagree." Although he requests that everyone maintain "traditional standards of civility," the problem lies in the belief that one can simply "disagree" with a student's gender identity and expression. Names and pronouns are not preferred, they are required. While Dr. Farrow has the right to disagree with PFNP, he cannot disregard the fundamental rights of all students—including the right to freely express gender identity—nor can he circumvent McGill policy.

Dr. Farrow has been revered by the SRS for his contributions to the study of theology, despite the blatant, discriminatory views entrenched in his work. While the students and faculty within the SRS are entitled to hold personal opinions, this reverence has exceeded personal respect; Dr. Farrow's

publications, which are further elaborated below, are on display in the Birks Building lobby. This suggests that such discriminatory views are openly accepted by the administration, despite facilitating a hostile environment for many marginalized students.

According to the definition of academic freedom of McGill and many other academic institutions, Dr. Farrow has the right to express and publish any views that he may hold. That said, no one's freedoms, academic or otherwise, should encroach on another's. As such, having Dr. Farrow teach courses that are mandatory for B.Th students, such as theological ethics, forces students into an environment that denies the dignity of their identity and personhood, thus making the SRS inaccessible and unsafe to the many LGBTQ+ students in the SRS. In other words, just as Dr. Farrow has the right to freedom of speech, students have the right to a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, Dr. Farrow's discourse not only denies the legitimacy of LGBTQ+ identity, but for those who are still struggling with understanding their own identity, his discriminatory language can be traumatic, particularly when the topics of the courses involve the concept of God, faith, and the understanding of identities in a theological framework. For these reasons, Dr. Farrow's unfiltered and unapologetic perpetuation of heavily prejudiced views, which he attempts to justify under the guise of free speech, must be responsibly addressed.

Given the numerous examples and comments that we have highlighted in this letter, we, the undersigned, are offering our full support to students who have been targeted by Dr. Farrow's system of discriminatory beliefs. To this end, we request that the SRS provide students greater flexibility in their course choice by assigning additional professors to the mandatory classes that are currently taught exclusively by Dr. Farrow. Many of Dr. Farrow's classes have been taught by other professors in the past, and we hope that similar changes can be made again. We also call on the SRS to remove his homophobic and transphobic works from the display cases in the Birks lobby. McGill and the SRS can use this opportunity to demonstrate their support for students by affirming that marginalization on the part of professors will not be tolerated. While it is important to maintain academic freedom, students should have the freedom to feel safe and welcome in their classrooms, and we implore the SRS and McGill to take the steps necessary to ensure this.

Sincerely,

[The Religious Studies Undergraduate Society](#)

[Theological Undergraduate Students' Association - TUSA](#)

[Arts Undergraduate Society of McGill University](#)

[Students' Society of McGill University \(SSMU\)](#)

[Union for Gender Empowerment](#)

Google doc version of this statement:

<https://docs.google.com/.../1lqQPS3SlagV7KBkoJK5F.../edit...>

We've compiled a list of resources for students impacted by this document or their interactions with Professor Farrow here: <https://docs.google.com/.../1ceR44sVB4L46Va1bXIXbjWV.../edit>

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