

Against Suppression

A Response to Chris MacDonald on Whether Universities Should Rent Space to Psychic Fairs

1. Neither Saint Mary's University itself nor any campus group has (or should have) the responsibility to ensure that vendors on campus do not commit fraud. Allegations of fraud are matters for the police and the courts.
2. As far as I know, the police and the courts are fine with psychic fairs. Individual consumers can complain to the police or the courts if they think they have been cheated.
3. It is not the bus driver's business to ask you where you intend to go and what you intend to do when you get there. It is not her business to refuse you service should she deem your project unworthy or worse. The university rents space to vendors and others, and it allows campus groups to do so; it is not its business to ask what the space is to be used for.
4. If renting space to vendors does not itself prevent the university fulfilling its mission, and the university allows the Students' Association to make money by renting space to vendors, then the Students' Association does nothing wrong renting space to vendors at market rates on either a first come-first served basis or on the basis of what it thinks students need or want. There's nothing wrong with the Students' Association renting to purveyors of psychic goods or purveyors of any other legal goods or services, no matter how anti-intellectual or how distant from the university's mission those goods or services are.
5. A world without psychic fairs, without religion, without *People* magazine would be a better world than this. But our task, as both citizens and intellectuals, is to criticize these things, not suppress them by denying them venues. Our fire should be directed toward psychic fairs and the claims of psychics, and not toward the businesses or other organizations that provide venues for psychics. And we should be concerned to explain in what the value of living without superstition consists and to model publicly how exciting, satisfying, and fun it is to live a life without superstition.
6. That our university gives special emphasis to the Christian tradition and values (Statement of Objectives, Academic Calendar, p. 8), that we have Chaplaincy Services, and that some members of our Board of Governors are appointed by Catholic organizations does, though, pose a threat to our mission as a secular educators and intellectuals.