

Response to Colin Dodds on university and civil society

Letter to the editor

Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, 1 June 2011

On-line at <http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com/opinion/article/1411211>

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Saint Mary's University president J. Colin Dodds says that universities serve us all by promoting civil society ("Will demography define region?", 20 May 2011). Would that universities in fact did promote civil society! Events show clearly, though, that they have abandoned that task.

Nowadays the prevailing university ideology is that of the safe campus. According to this ideology, certain ideas and discussions tend to marginalize some people and to maintain oppressive social structures. For that reason, authorities must suppress these ideas and discussions themselves or stand aside when students attempt to do so.

This ideology is authoritarian and contrary to both freedom of expression and dispassionate inquiry; thus, it stands opposed to civil society.

President Dodds's own university is in the grip of the safe campus ideology. Take, for instance, the recent case in which the administration of Saint Mary's failed to respond when the students' association ordered a campus society to remove a sign from its display.

If President Dodds wants universities again to take up the task of producing graduates keen on freedom, equality, and democracy, he would do well to turn his attention to his own university's indifference and hostility to the values of civil society.