

Letter to the Women's Centre re boycotts

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Editor's note: *In the lead up to The Journal's final print issue the Women's Centre put forward a boycott due to the publication of an article by "The Cranky Professor" Mark Mercer in the March 8th issue of The Journal. The Women's Centre was given right to reply to Mercer's original article as an alternative to boycott but declined. The following is a letter to the editor from Mark Mercer on the subject of boycotts.*

Boycotts and petitions run contrary to the values of intellectual community and respect for persons. Intellectual community and respect for persons require the free expression and dissemination of ideas and emotions, while boycotts and petitions seek to shut down expression and discussion.

Inquiry and communication, if they are to serve truth, good reason, and our sense of ourselves as autonomous agents, able to make up our minds for ourselves, need to be guided by and answerable to evidence and argument—but they must be guided by and answerable to evidence and argument alone. Otherwise, they can be manipulative, bypassing our ability to decide for ourselves. The point of petition and boycotts, though, is precisely to put social or political pressure on people, not the pressure of evidence and argument.

If an article in *The Journal* strikes you as wrong-headed, your responsibility is to formulate your criticism in words and to make your words available to anyone who wants or needs to hear them. Your responsibility is to counter what you take to be false or poorly-reasoned contentions with critical discussion. Boycotts and petitions seek not to enlighten people or to enable them to change their minds freely, but instead to intimidate them and to cow them into doing what you want.

So what is the Women's Centre's complaint regarding the article of mine that ran in the 14 March 2012 edition of *The Journal*? Members of the Women's Centre: Write up that complaint and circulate it. That way you will be contributing to the life of Saint Mary's, rather than seeking to tamp that life down.