

Friday Night Theology, 27th November 2009.
Original Violence

One of the less well noticed aspects of [last week's Humanist campaign](#) was their suggestion that we allow our children to "freely explore their moral and philosophical beliefs, to maximise their own ability to explore the world for themselves." They told us that "presenting only your own views...will not be very productive."

I found this particularly ironic in light of [the announcement this week](#) that children as young as five are to be taught that "domestic violence against women and girls is unacceptable." I wonder what the Humanists would make of this? Will they be telling the government that to impose such moral beliefs on children is wrong because it hinders their ability to freely explore their own moral boundaries? Somehow, I don't think so.

I suspect that they are more than happy (as they should be) for this education campaign to go ahead, but what this does reveal is the wooliness at the heart of their thinking – a wooliness, incidentally, that is perhaps also evident in the government campaign.

Domestic violence is a real and significant social problem. That's one of the reasons why the Evangelical Alliance is currently conducting some research on the issue (and to take part see here). But it is a problem that cannot simply be solved by school education campaigns, and certainly not by an inappropriate emphasis on the autonomy of children to develop their own moral thinking.

The government's campaign, "[Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls](#)", is full of many worthwhile, and very important proposals – but its title signals the fact that it fails to recognize what is actually at the heart of the problem: our innate propensity to sin.

I fully support the government in what they are trying to do to prevent this evil, but they are being naive if they think that a few more lessons, however early they are given, will eradicate violence in our society. Whether 'together' or apart, we simply cannot "end" the problem of domestic abuse. The reality of original sin, our inborn inclination to do what is wrong, is simply too strong for that.

And this is also why the Humanist campaign is so wrong-footed. The reason children cannot simply be left alone to explore their own morality is because within each one of us resides this predisposition to do what is wrong, not what is right (Romans 7:18-19). *Lord of the Flies* may be uncomfortable reading, but it points to a truth that we must never ignore.

In an interview on [Newsnight earlier this year](#), the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, stumped Jeremy Paxman when he said that the heart of the problem that led to the current economic crisis was "original sin...inbuilt into human beings, a sort of dangerous taste for unreality." Mr Paxman did not know how to respond because the truth of this theological maxim was blindingly obvious. The same is also the case in respect of violence, including domestic violence. The fundamental problem is our inborn desire to assert our will and our autonomy over others. In the Garden of Eden, we tried it in relation to God, and we have been doing it to each other ever since. None of this means that we shouldn't try to address these problems in ways such as the government suggests. But what it does indicate is that until we grasp this nettle, and acknowledge the problem of sin, neither wooly talk of children's autonomy nor extra PSHE lessons will solve the problem of who we are, for fundamentally what is required is a transformation that only Christ can provide – a transformation that begins now and is completed in eternity.

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