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## Is More Education the Answer to Australia's Sex Abuse Crisis?

By David Robertson

We have had two weeks of continual news about sex abuse. The disclosures about the alleged rape of Brittany Higgins by a staffer in the office of the Defence Minister, Linda Reynolds, has opened up a whole can of worms. We are told that Canberra is a toxic culture of drunkenness and sexual abuse.

Meanwhile the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on a petition by a former pupil who is now doing her Masters in gender and education at University College, London. The petition, signed by 1500 pupils and former pupils, complains about the level of sexual abuse of girls in Sydney schools – this abuse by boys largely taking place outside schools. It is a horrendous story – the details of which are gross and not suitable for this publication. The petitioners want there to be more sex education, particularly around the issue of consent.

I believe the petitioners and have every sympathy with them, and indeed with those who are complaining about the 'toxic culture' in Canberra. Sadly, neither of these situations are unique – every week it seems as though there is a new story of abuse within the Church – think for example of the horrendous stories coming out about Ravi Zacharias. And then there is the major problem of domestic abuse – much of it sexual.

As a Presbyterian minister I have witnessed the fruit of a sex obsessed culture in so many ways. I have contacts within the Scottish Parliament who tell me that it is the same in Edinburgh as in Canberra. Politicians having affairs, sleeping with staffers, using their power to abuse, or just simply being obnoxious. The latest court case involving the former First Minister, Alex Salmond, has been incredible to watch. Can you imagine Scott Morrison being accused of assaulting women, including attempted rape? Salmond was cleared of the accusations, but not before much of the grimy culture within politics in Scotland, and some of his own sleazy behaviour, was exposed.

Over the years I have heard many desperate stories, both

personally and from colleagues. The student raped at a party and blaming herself for drinking; the young man raped by a businessman at another party who was told by the police that homosexual rape could not be proved; the female lecturer who was caught by a colleague kissing a female student; another female student who slept with a sleazy lecturer because he hinted that she might get better grades if she did so; the elder who left his wife and children because of an affair he had with a colleague; the middle-aged man accused of grooming a 16 year old; the teenage girl with gender dysphoria who was raped as a child - the list is almost endless.

So what's the solution to this? Is the problem really the lack of education? Yes – in at least one sense. I don't think the problem is one that will be solved by more sex education in schools or teaching consent. Is it really the case that children and teenagers don't know that their bodies are their own and they have the right to say no? It may be, but I struggle to see how. I knew, and I taught my children – it's your body, no one else's. More than that your body is sacred. But perhaps that is the problem. We don't educate our children in a wholistic, biblical view of humanity, sex and relationships.

One thing is certain – our culture is sex obsessed. We bring our children up in an environment where they witness sexual acts and attitudes on mainstream culture and where hardcore pornography is available on any mobile phone. We give them the message that sex is an appetite to be indulged and as long as it is 'safe' and involves 'consent' then go ahead and indulge. In fact, our children are likely to get more warnings about sugar in food than they are to be told about the dangers of sex outside marriage. A society which teaches abstinence about certain foods and lifestyles (you need to look after your body and save the planet), cannot bring itself to say that sex is sacred, special and should be limited within the context of a loving relationship – marriage.

To give young men (and in some cases women – although

sexual aggression is largely a male problem) the ideology of sex as appetite, and access to continual porn, and then expect them not to act upon that is as dopey as teaching a child to love chocolate, and then placing him in a sweetie shop and telling him not to touch! None of that is to excuse or minimise the seriousness of sexual abuse – but rather to enhance it.

Consent is an issue. But it is not *the* issue. Education is an issue. But not in the sense that our secular society perceives education. We need a much bigger solution and a far greater education. We need to return to the Christian perspective of humanity, gender, sex, humility, sexuality, community, family and relationships. And respect.

In their 1981 song, *Centrefold*, the J Geils Band sang about how a man was shocked to discover his girlfriend was in a pornographic magazine he was reading. The song was about his own hypocrisy. I remember at the time thinking I need to treat all women with respect, not as sex objects like meat, but as though they were my mother, sister etc. I did not then know that this was the biblical perspective (1 Timothy 5:2). I determined not to look at pornography ever again or look upon women as sexual objects – again not knowing that was biblical (Job 31:1). I'm not claiming to have done that perfectly, but like many I can say that by the grace of God, the Christian understanding of sex and humanity has saved many of us from the Highway to Hell (Proverbs 7:27). If our society wishes to stay on that Highway to Hell we cannot expect the fruits of heaven. We reap what we sow. In the 1960's we sowed the wind, 50 years later we are now

reaping the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7) and it is children and women who suffer the most.

If our society continues to reject biblical education, then families and the Church need to make an extra effort to ensure that our children are taught the way of the Lord so that they will not depart from it. We cannot leave sex education to an educational system which fundamentally is opposed to Christ's teaching. In addition, we need to set an example by dealing with the sexual abuses within the church, clearly and openly. When we stumble and fall, we need to avoid the pathetic excuses and instead humbly and genuinely repent as David did (Psalm 51). We must not use grace to justify sin and abuse. We must not elevate some sexual sins above others. We must support and help one another – and when there are those within the Church who teach and practise the opposite, we must deal with them as Paul urged the Corinthian church to deal with the sexual immorality within its midst (1 Corinthians 5). If we do not practise what we preach why should anyone listen to us?

We live in dangerous and perverse times. Let us seek to be blameless and pure, "*children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life*" (Philippians 2:15-16).

**David Robertson.**