



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 9, 2009

## School Bans Girl from Wearing Pro-life T-shirt

Writing about the story at Christian Today, Jennifer Gold [tells us](#):

A 16-year-old mother has been banned by her secondary school [the Banff Academy] for wearing a T-shirt protesting against abortions in Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Sarah Scott, who gave birth just four months ago, was told that she must not wear her black T-shirt with the words "Abortion is Murder" printed on it. The school said the T-shirt was offensive....



Scott, who alleged her views had strengthened on the issue after the birth of her own son, explained: "I was wearing the T-shirt when a teacher approached me and [said] that I was never to wear it again because she found it offensive. I was told I could be excluded from school if I wear it again."

Scott is complaining that her school is infringing on her freedom of speech, and this response isn't surprising. Yet it's not a valid argument. Now, this doesn't mean I side with the school; it's just that I don't side with bad argumentation, either. Let's analyze the issue.

We don't afford minors the full rights of adulthood; they may not vote, drive, enter into contracts, buy alcohol, and cigarettes, etc., until a certain age. And there simply is no such thing as a right to freedom of speech in school, as students may not express certain ideas, curse at teachers (at least in principle this is prohibited), or shout out whenever they please. Of course, I realize that the courts dispute this and have now made themselves the arbiters of exactly "how much" free speech a child should enjoy in school, but this is nothing but judicial activism. In effect, these jurists are violating the principle of subsidiarity and are usurping the role of local school boards and school administrations, entities that far more accurately reflect the will of parents.

The bottom line is that teachers and administrators must be able to enforce standards and maintain order, and this is impossible without the ability to control discourse. (While I wouldn't put my children in our government schools, I recognize that *if* such institutions are to exist, we must recognize that teachers and administrators act *in loco parentis*.) Thus, I acknowledge a school's right to stifle the expression of certain ideas.

Having said this, I will quote the G.K. Chesterton tautology and say, "Having the right to do something is not at all the same as being right in doing it." And in the case of the Banff Academy, the school is very wrong in how it chooses to exercise its ability to censor. Yet, worse still is the reasoning behind its choice.

Note that the school didn't say the pro-life message "Abortion is Murder" was wrong; rather, it fell back on the now worn-out rationale that it was "offensive." This isn't surprising, mind you, as in the relativistic universe of secularism, "wrong" has little meaning. Of course, we should first understand that it's fruitless to reference Truth (objective right and wrong) when trying to defend a lie. So this is



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certainly not a tactic to use when trying to squelch a pro-life message. Yet, on a more basic level, relativists won't cite "wrong" because they don't believe it exists apart from man. This is why they shy away from absolutist terms such as "right and wrong" and "morality" and instead may speak of "values," which they fancy to be authored by man. However, a corollary of the idea that they are man's handiwork is that values are then just synonymous with opinion, which in turn means they are just reflections of people's feelings. After all, if we don't have the Truth to refer to when making value judgments, what do we have left to use as a yardstick but feelings? This is why relativists are more comfortable talking about offensiveness: declaring something "wrong" essentially means citing God's law, which they believe is imaginary. But to declare something "offensive" they only have to cite their feelings, which are certainly real. And you cannot tell me what does or doesn't offend me. I may not know the first thing about morality, but I sure know what my feelings are.

And this is why citing offensiveness when establishing rules is so dangerous. This standard detaches rule-making from right and wrong and makes it subject to that most whimsical and arbitrary of things, emotion. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Passion governs and she never governs wisely." And there are about as many tastes regarding offensiveness as there are in food. Why, based on how people use the word today (which I'll address in a moment), everything offends someone, and everyone is offended by something. Hitler was offended by Jews. Devout Moslems may be offended by seeing-eye dogs. Philanderers may be offended by talk of chastity and drunkards by talk of sobriety. Thus, it should be obvious that with an emotion-based standard such as offensiveness as a guide, feelings become the mercurial master of "moral" reality. It is then only a question of whose feelings will prevail, those of the majority or a ruling minority. And sometimes the results are roughly the same. In autocratic China, [forced abortion](#) snuffs out life. In the democratic West, social codes snuff out dissent that's pro-life.

In reality, however, offense cannot be given, it can only be taken. And something needs to be said about most of the leftists who scream "I'm offended!" when hearing contrary opinions.

They're not actually offended.

They just don't happen to like what you're saying.

I have [dubbed](#) this "The Offensiveness Ploy," and to understand why it's used requires a bit of translation. When "I'm offended!" is uttered, what is usually meant is, "I hate what you're saying! Now shut your mouth!" Yet saying this plainly is counterproductive. It brands you as rude and intolerant and thereby hurts your cause. So the intolerant don't admit hatred but claim offense, thus putting the onus on their adversaries. Because, after all, you'd have to be a mighty bad person to want to offend others.

Getting back to the young Scot Miss Scott, she pointed out that while her school's administrators claim her pro-life T-shirt is offensive, they say nothing about classmates who show up sporting the Playboy logo. But, hey, I guess symbols associated with pornography don't offend them.

And that is what happens when you detach yourself from right and wrong. Really, we ought to worry less about what offends man and more about what offends God.

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