

Violence in the Schoolyard: Why?

Jimmy Williams

America is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live. Random violence. Drive-by shootings. Colombine. A twelve-year old boy kills his schoolmate with a pistol he has brought to school. Why? “Well, he ticked me off!” was the reply.

No remorse. . . No conscience.

Do you know what a “feral” hog is? We have some here in Texas — domesticated pigs which have escaped into the brushy Hill Country and live there as wild as their smaller, wild cousins, the Javelinas.

There have been feral children, too. Perhaps the most famous was a teenage boy spotted one day naked and loping up a hill on all fours in Aveyron, France. He was captured on July 25, 1799 and extensive attempts were made to “rehabilitate” and “domesticate” him. These ended largely in failure, including Herculean efforts to teach him to speak (he was mute when first found).

Anyone who has ever observed children suddenly transplanted into another culture are amazed at the way they take to the local language like “ducks to water!” Why? Because children from age one to seven or eight have an enormous capacity to learn — to absorb sights and sounds and smells and everything!

Children have a conscience, too. It is not yet fully formed by way of specifics, but like the capacity to learn language, they possess the ideas of right and wrong. As they grow, through experience, parental guidance and discipline, school, church, etc., they come to embrace moral concepts as easily and automatically as they do linguistic ones.

Today we tend to be “politically correct” and to not push our personal, moral, and religious agendas off on others. We are hesitant to speak of right and wrong in public for fear of offending.

You see, it is assumed that we already know what is right and what is wrong. It is assumed that you know that. And that the children know. . .

But they don't know. Their conscience must be educated, and this is the problem. Children are growing up in America as crippled morally as that wild boy in Aveyron was, linguistically and socially. We have raised an entire generation of "morally feral" children!

I have a good friend of thirty-five years who sold his business and began to use his time in ministering to students at the large, state university in his city. He began to meet with students daily in the student center on campus. Jay was seminary trained and is one of the most effective personal workers I have ever known.

He told me recently that he asks the same question of almost every student: "If you knew God does exist, and it were possible for you to have a personal interview or conversation with Him, what would you ask Him?"

Jay said that SIXTY PERCENT of those have replied with something like, "Gee. . . Gosh! I've never thought about that. . . I don't know what I'd ask Him. . . I guess nothing!"

What they have lots to say about, however, is that no one should be excluded, and everyone's opinion is true because it is "true to them." This is practicing "tolerance." And anyone who doesn't hold this view is a bigot. They think it a crime of the highest order to exclude anyone on the basis of personal belief or lifestyle.

Actually, tolerance is a Christian virtue and should be practiced. But what does it really mean? It doesn't mean that all lifestyles must be accepted. That is not tolerance, but rather, surrender — tacit acceptance of all behavior with no regard to standards of any kind.

What kind of "tolerance" did Jesus practice? We are told that He was *full* of grace

and truth. And these two were always in perfect balance. We, however, tend toward the extremes of these — so full of grace that we compromise the Gospel, or so full of truth that no one can stand us!

Over and over again, we see Jesus “nudging” people toward truth: Nicodemus. The rich young ruler. The parables. The woman at the well. Pilate. Will Rogers is probably known best for his famous quote: “I never met a man I didn’t like.” It could be said of Jesus that He never met a person He didn’t love. He loved and accepted every person He met, including those whose behavior He could not condone. That’s tolerance. To the woman caught in the act of adultery He said, “Neither do I condemn you (grace); go and sin no more (truth)!”

Jesus pressed. He wanted people to understand truth so much that He was not afraid to offend them if it would help to accomplish that purpose.

And so must we upon occasion. Remember: Even God is not universally admired!