

Bullying Has Got To Stop!

Bullying is the subject of current news stories. Teenage girls have been raped, shamed on the internet, tormented by peers, and abandoned by their schools and home communities. When their torment became unbearable, they chose suicide as their 'only' option for escape.

Each rape victim spent most of her time in a workplace: a school. So, let us apply *Christ and the Workplace* perspectives to:

- bullying in schools (and beyond)
- where Christ is in all of this

Schools, communities and values:

A common response by people and organizations in stressful situations is: act surprised; deny everything; blame someone else. This response comes from being confronted by reality, and refusing to accept it.

Three examples of *surprise, deny, blame* are evident in rape stories from South Hadley, Massachusetts; Steubenville, Ohio; and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Teenage girls were bullied in their workplaces, and poorly supported by public officials. Their suicides were responded to with surprise at what happened; denial of responsibility, and blaming of victims.

This kind of response is not good enough by Jesus' standards. Jesus emphasized the role of justice throughout his earthly ministry. Justice requires people to stand by the victim and the oppressed, unconditionally. God's justice, therefore, always supersedes that of the state.

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-36) exemplifies this point. Good, upstanding people passed by an injured man, lying beside the road. As they passed by, they were obeying their religious and cultural norms. There was nothing in state law which required helping someone in need. So, they did nothing.

Then, a Samaritan, despised by everyone else on religious and cultural grounds, helped the man. Jesus' points:

- put people first
- go beyond restricting, organizational values to help people

Some people are practicing Jesus' values, and they are making a difference:

- a District Attorney in South Hadley
- public opinion in Steubenville
- *Anonymous* in Halifax

In each of these cases, those who raped and bullied are being (or about to be) prosecuted, and held accountable for their actions. That is good news.

Where Christ is in all of this

We must do all we can to stop bullying. What happened to each victim goes beyond cowardly cruelty to the crucifixion of a person's very being. It goes against everything that 2,000 years of Christian teaching and standards say to us. Whatever drives a young person to choose death as her only escape from cruelty must be condemned by civilized, Christian society. As aggressively as the bullies themselves, parents, schools, and school boards and the public must push back against bullying.

For bereaved families, teachers and other support persons, the story of Jesus' life offers us comfort and hope.



While Jesus was dying on the cross, he cried:

My God! Why have you forsaken me?

His life had hit bottom. Everything he taught and did was rejected. He felt alone. Death lay before him; what had been or might have been lay behind him. But, in his next breath, he was able to say, *Into your hands, I commend my spirit.*

Jesus, like the three rape victims, was never alone. His friends, peers, organized religion and the state abandoned him, but God remained faithful to him. He was unable to recognize or feel God's presence, but what God does never depends on what we think or how we feel. God always held life before him. Death became God's means for new life through resurrection.

We may take comfort that each rape victim is in God's hands, and what wonderful hands they are! There shall be no more torment, no more shame, no more injustice. Every tear shall be wiped away. The victimized girls are at peace.

For we, who remain, we need to examine how we respond to bullying and its victims. If current ways for stopping and punishing it do not work, it is time to introduce new methods, combining law and Christian ethics (which assumes: we are responsible to God for everything and everyone). The price of the status quo in human life is too high! God's justice must prevail in our laws, organizational standards and practices, and in every one of us.

Conclusion:

Three cases have been referred to, here. But, the principles in each are shared in other examples – most recently, in California...again. Those in authority over children – parents, teachers, school boards, and the legal system – must stop bullying. *Surprise, deny, blame* is not acceptable. We must affirm life, embrace God's justice for all, and protect all God's children.

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