

We Teach Children That Incivility is Rewarded

Our country and much of the world has expressed shock and horror at the verbal and physical treatment meted out to a 68-year-old grandmother and bus monitor in Greece, New York.

Karen Klein tried to maintain her composure while her tormentors continued their assault.

Many adults have reacted by sending her money as if a few dollars can erase the hurt that these foul-mouthed children inflicted. Their parents have expressed surprise.

We are not surprised. It is the behavior we encourage and reward.

Remember Congressman Joe Wilson whose single claim to fame is that he called the president of the United States a liar during his State of the Union address?

Most listeners had never heard of Wilson before that incident, but they rewarded him with thousands of dollars for his re-election campaign. He was re-elected.

His party made excuses for him. He was offered speaking engagements across the country simply because he had shown extraordinary poor judgment and incivility.

Our airwaves are filled with innuendo and disrespect. Recall Rush Limbaugh's rant about the young female law student, Sandra Fluke, who testified before a congressional committee.

Glenn Beck fills the airwaves and his personal appearances with half-truths and derogatory language. His audiences encourage him to be even more derogatory. He rakes in millions of dollars as his hate caravan rolls across the country.

Bill Maher is more vulgar than liberal, but he is just as disgusting.

During my years as a practicing speech language pathologist, a child whose speech was barely understandable would color the air purple with his limited vocabulary.

The parent would look at me and mumble, "I don't know where he heard that kind of language."

Maybe the parent didn't know, but I knew. Speech is learned. Behavior is caused.

Two North Carolina pastors have waded into the language swamp. One wants to put all the gays and lesbians in an outdoor pen and watch them die.

The other is urging the parents of young boys to break their sons' wrists if they show any signs of being effeminate.

There is one glimmer of hope. The Wisconsin Council of Churches has called for A Season of Civility.

They reason that the recent recall election has so polarized the state that desperate measures are required.

Thirty-five members of the clergy representing different religious groups have asked their fellow clergy to join them in preaching and teaching about civility.

The incident on the bus in New York has amply demonstrated that Wisconsin is not alone in its need to rekindle an atmosphere of civility. Churches cannot do the job alone. They require our help.

Parents can monitor the TV programs and websites their children frequent. All electronic devices have off switches. They can complain to advertisers and refuse to purchase the advertisers' products.

Schools can teach respect for authority and common decency. They can require compliance at least during school hours. These activities can and will have some effect.

Absolutely nothing will be as effective as grown-ups modeling the behavior we want. Seeing adults who are consistent in their respectful treatment of others will plant the message in a way nothing else can.

Resolve to see the best in everybody and everything and to reflect that in your speech.

Realize that you will be ridiculed for such behavior, but be firm in your resolve.

We are all responsible for the atmosphere around us. This is a problem that no amount of money can solve. The only solution that stands a chance is personal resolve and involvement.

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