

Chalkboard

By

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At the risk of offending some readers, I will begin with a major premise that it was God Who created mankind rather than a random combination of genetic material in some primordial soup. If you believe different, just bear with me for pseudosyllogistic proposes. This article is not geared to convert anyone's thinking on the creation although I personally believe the one in the Bible to be true.

A minor premise might be stated that God is good. So how would the syllogism go? God made man in his image. God is good. Man is good. (Okay, for you pastors – man was good.) This whole line of thinking might be summed up by saying, "God didn't make no junk."

I write all that to say that we had a stint of spring fever mixed with a touch of racial conflict at the middle school last week. You have to be an educator or the parent of a middle school age student to fully appreciate the turbulence of emotion that occurs in the best of times for that age of student much less any extraneous distractions they have such as deciding which group of students are the "toughest" or "most cool" or whatever adjective is in vogue for the moment.

As a former principal of a junior high school housing grades 7-9, last week brought back a few unpleasant memories from a decade or so ago. It was a time when "gangs" were beginning to surface as a, for lack of a better word, phenomenon. For whatever the reason that caused this happening, it made being a school principal more difficult. It made the task of keeping students, staff, and parents focused on improving student achievement a difficult one.

Always inherent to this grouping of certain students of similar background together was the formation of another group who would be the protagonist group's antagonist. Equally intrinsic to the situation would be the fact that the great majority of the student body belonged to neither group and were busily going about the daily school routine oblivious to the functioning of either.

From time to time, one group was always planning to "beat up" someone from the other group for some imagined wrong. Perhaps serious issues like "I told him not to be looking at my girlfriend" or "She was talking about my mama". Many times, before school or at lunch break, the

rival groups would congregate together until either the duty teachers dispersed them or the bell sounded to go to classes.

Almost as frequent would be the rumors that someone was going to bring some type weapon and do someone harm. Such stories would spread like a virus and days could be spent tracking down the “He said...She said” reportings usually with the same end- a lot of smoke and a tiny fire. As any administrator would tell you, the time to put out those fires are when they are tiny.

Any secondary school administrator would also tell you that many discipline problems that seem to be racial in nature would occur if only students of any single race attended the school. It’s just a fact that part of growing up for some students involves some conflict with others. When the students are of a different culture those same conflicts often get mislabeled.

On the flip side, some problems are genuinely racial in nature. Sadly a few students do come from homes where anyone from another culture is viewed with suspicion or disdain. Chisel this thought in concrete- what children hear at home shapes their developing views of others.

Also equally true in a time when there have been school yard shootings in America of students by other students, I want to assure you that all of your administrators take all rumors seriously and deal with such until it can be determined what the root of the problem is. Our school does not have immunity from irrational behavior any more than any other public school in America.

I started this article somewhat facetiously with references to God. As your public school superintendent it is not important that you are aware of my religious beliefs. However, it is important that you understand how my beliefs shape my actions in the public arena with regard to the treatment of students. In my religious upbringing I have read and been taught from childhood from the Bible that God is not a respecter of persons. Restated, God does not favor one person or group of people over another person or group based on any differences or similarities of the characteristics exhibited by those groups. He only deals with the behavior.

That precept shapes my thinking. Last week one school board member received a call from a parent who asked, “What are you going to do with those _____ students?” I told the board member later that my answer would have been; “We are going to treat them just like we treat your child, so how do you want us to treat them?”

My personal belief and my expectation for all the staff is that we see all of our students as just that- all are our students. I expect that attitude to

be imparted to our student body. All students are of equal importance and all have the same opportunity to receive a good education at our school. To date, there are no serious problems of culture clash at our school. It is important to me, and I am sure to you, that it remains that way.

It takes many strokes to paint the portrait of a child. When the Great Master was painting, He had a lot of colors on His palette.