

Core Values

How often do you discuss your core values with people who do not agree with you? If you don't mingle with people outside your class, religion, or ethnic background, you don't know what other people value—from the President to local leaders. We choose our blogs accordingly. For example, I am a white, middle-class American raised in Christian values. I'd like to understand people who don't share my core values.

Why? I know I can't persuade anyone to change his sub-conscious values. But I do want greater understanding among people everywhere. It could lead to better cooperation, if not affection.

Here are two actual dialogues to illustrate value, one overheard on a bus, the other at an upscale restaurant.

The Kindness of Strangers on a bus:

A young man with a blond crew cut and tattooed skin lay on his back on the side seat, talking into his cell phone. The bus stopped. A short, heavy woman made three attempts to climb on board before she made it.

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The man moved to the front facing seat so she could sit on the long side seat. The bus pulled into traffic. The man, still on his phone, asked the woman if she had a pen.

“Sure.” It took a mile to find it in her purse. A mile later, he hung up and reached forward with her pen.

”Keep it,” she said. I have more.”

“Thanks.”

“You were talking about a two-year old boy. Your son?” she asked.

“Yup.” That began a ten-mile conversation. He described an accident that nearly killed him. “I survived and found the Lord. It was my third DUI. Now that I’ve found Jesus I don’t drink no more.”

“It wasn’t your time,” she said.

“Right. The Lord spared me for my son. When I was in jail my ex brought him to visit me every week.”

“Which jail?”

“County. I have to take the bus everywhere. Can’t get another license for three years.”

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“I have to take the bus, too,” she said. “Because of my eyes. No side vision.

“It’d be hard to drive if you couldn’t see the sides.”

“I take the bus every week,” she said, “to visit my husband locked up at Ash.”

“Atascadero?” the man asked. “How long’s he been in?”

“Three years. We have faith in the Lord that he’ll get out soon.” She paused a quarter of a mile. “Does your son have your blond hair, too?”

“Naw, it’s dark. I bleach my hair.”

“My son bleaches his, too.”

“Does he visit Atascadero?”

“Not his Dad. We only been married four years.”

“Wow, you only had one year. I hope he gets out soon. Man, I’m staying out this time. I’m not gonna break any law! Gonna stay clean for the Lord. Oops, here’s my stop. Thanks for the pen. Nice talking to you.” He jumped off the bus, unhooked his bike, and rode right through a red light.

The fat lady sang.

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The following took place in a five-star restaurant. At a table for ten, a Catholic LA judge, the eldest of eight children, argued about Roe vs. Wade with me, the youngest of five. My replies are in italics.

Judge: "You agree that life begins at conception. Abortion should be outlawed across the board. There's nothing in the Constitution to allow it."

But not all law comes straight out of.—

"Our constitution is based on the ten commandments. 'Thou shall not kill.'"

Then why do we wage war and condone capital punishment?

"You said you agree that life begins at conception. It should be against the law to take that life."

It should be against the law to take a woman's life for her fetus.

"You agree that it's wrong to kill."

Yes, but we should legislate against killing children as well as fetuses.

"Nonsense. You have to stop aggression before it starts."

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The others at the table tried to cut off this conversation—to no avail. After dinner, the judge hugged me. I had given him a chance to express his core values. I began to understand his emotional background. I didn't agree with him, but liked him.

What were the sources of the values expressed by the fat lady on the bus, the young man who broke the red light law out of habit, the judge and me? Why should you care?

It's a matter of survival of the species. We may become an endangered species if we continue to build reasons to kill each other. What really motivates the Taliban?