

I should know better than to judge one of them. I DO know better. After all, one of the things I discuss with my students about the issue of judgment is the predicament it puts us in, and the consequences that follow. So you would think I could practice what I preach, especially when it comes to them. Well, I try; I SO do try not to judge a book by its cover.

Our society has raised us to judge on the basis of many things: sex, race, religion, appearance, you name it. And I admit to you that I for one am guilty of conforming to this more often that I care to, occasionally jumping to conclusions about people when I know I shouldn't. So as part of my responsibilities as a Christian, I talk to my students about the problem that judging is — and I call it a problem because that's exactly what it is. Just like us grown-ups, except actually at a higher level, teenagers get caught up in what our society feeds them about looks, behaviors, relationships, etc. Their need to fit in and be accepted often distorts how they view and treat others. So my students and I discuss this. I think I've been discussing this with them for most of the 30 years I've been teaching, so you would think I have it down. Yet, every once in a while I get caught up in that awful trap too. After all, as fitting or not as the judgment may be, the cover is still the first thing a person sees.

Recently, one of my students showed up to class with her bottom lip pierced, twice over. Right…ouch. Given that it was just the second class of the term, and I didn't know much about this group yet, I was immediately consumed by judgment. She happens to also dress a bit gothic. So right off the bat, I labeled her. Not much was revealed about her in the couple of weeks that followed, as she kept to herself, and so the label stuck. Then came the class during which I give them an assignment to write about an encounter they have with Jesus, detailing when and where it takes place, what is said, describing Him, etc. As you can imagine, I always get back very interesting essays. But let me just say without beating around the bush any longer, that hers blew my mind. I found myself reading the name on top of the page more than once to make sure it wasn't someone else's paper I was reading. I wish I could show you, but I don't publish my students' writings, only quote excerpts. I can tell you, however, this essay was almost grammatically perfect, well structured, and most

importantly, imaginative to the tenth power: "…[He] opened his hands and formed them into a bowl…showed me…the light flashing at my face…said if I can spread the word of God and follow his laws, I will go here…he closed his hands and the kingdom of God disappeared…He smiled and said 'be candid and love everything and everyone around you'…then he disappeared." This essay that to me appeared to be written by such an unlikely source, was full of hopeful connotations sounding well beyond the author's years; a piece containing lines contradicting of her appearance. "Tisk, tisk," I thought, "shame on you Connie."

As Christians we are supposed to see, or at least look for, the godly side in our fellow human beings, first and foremost. Despite the pressures society puts on us to form these preconceptions, we should, we must, try our darnedest to overcome the temptation to judge others and set them aside from the outset because they don't seem to meet our prerequisites. Sometimes the judgment fits but other times it doesn't. And think of what'd be at stake if we erred; what we'd risk losing — the opportunity to get to know someone; the opportunity to make a life-long friendship; or even the opportunity to learn from a student.

Thank heavens for the continuing reminders that life throws at us.
– *by Connie Perez*

Never judge a man by his umbrella. It may not be his.
– *Anonymous*

If you judge people you have no time to love them.
– *Mother Teresa*

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