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Home and Crime

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

In this essay I chose to write about the problem of crime in our society from a Christian perspective. Here are my thoughts.

At the present time our governments at the national, state, and local level are all working to do something about the major increase in lawlessness. I previously said something about the problem, but I did not address the origins of this increase. It is worth our while to do so.

Crime has its origin in the homes where criminals are raised. Many years ago Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck spent a lifetime studying the origins of crime. Their studies were published in a number of books such as *500 Criminal Careers*, *Later Criminal Careers*, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, and *Delinquents and Non-Delinquents in Perspective*. They learned a number of things that appear to have been ignored by politicians and penologists of our day.

1. The Gluecks observed that criminality can sometimes be detected at five years of age or earlier. Starting around the age of three some potentially delinquent children begin to run away from home. They usually do not become delinquent, however, until they start to school. Many of them progressively become chronic fighters, liars and thieves. Children who cruelly kill small animals on more than one occasion early in their lives have a great potential for violence as they mature.

2. The earlier delinquency begins, the more likely delinquency and criminality will continue. By this I mean that if a child becomes repeatedly delinquent at age five or six, he is more likely he is continue such behavior throughout his life time. On the other hand, persons who commit their first delinquent act after fifteen are unlikely to commit another.

3. Most criminals decrease their criminal behavior after the age of thirty five. Only a few persist in criminal activity after this time. Those that do will continue for the rest of their life.

4. Criminality has its origin in the home. The following factors contribute most to the genesis of delinquency an criminality.

A. Intellectual and emotional abnormalities in grandparents.

B. A high incidence of alcoholism and criminality in the homes where parents had grown up.

C. Physical, intellectual and emotional handicaps in the parents.

D. A high incidence of alcoholism in the parents. (Drug addiction was not the problem then that it is now.)

E. A greater incidence of dependence of these parents on welfare.

F. The physical or emotional absence of the father from the home. They emphasized the physical absence as one of the critical factors.

5. The Gluecks believed that some of the problem is genetic: i.e., the criminal has inherited a potential for a defective character structure. If this is the case, criminality is essentially irremediable, because our current state of knowledge does not let us correct genetic characterological defects. I might add, parenthetically, that with all the advances in genetics there is still no evidence to support their statement.

6. School and community programs will be useless unless something is done about the homes in which delinquent children live.

7. Community mental health resources cannot handle the problems after the fact. Prevention is the only way to deal with criminality.

8. When their research was done, there were no successful community programs to deal with the problem. I know of none that have been successful in the intervening years. Millions of dollars have been poured into effort to do something about the problem, but nothing has happened. Throwing money at it does not resolve the problem. It only provides salaries for bureaucrats to run unsuccessful programs.

There are many other studies that have attempted to evaluate the problem and define effective prevention programs. None have done more than confirm what the Glueck's observed.

Studies of the effects of punishment upon recidivism have demonstrated that swift, sure just punishment has an inhibiting effect. This is in keeping with childhood studies that demonstrate a positive effect of swift, sure and just punishment in eradicating undesirable behavior. Sadly, modern justice does not provide swift, sure and just punishment for criminal acts.

Although there is no evidence from scientific studies to document its efficacy, many still insist that the talon principle is applicable. It has its origin in the *Ten Commandments* and the Levitical law. God made it perfectly clear that a price

has to be paid, and that the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is to be applied. There are serious theologians who insist that justice as proclaimed by God is to be practiced. Capital punishment is biblical.

One last comment. Dr. Sam Guze and his students at Washington University have published a number of papers linking criminal acts to alcohol and drug addiction. They found that 60+% are directly related to alcohol and drugs. Yet very little attention is paid to these two problems in the criminal justice system.

Putting all of this together what conclusions can we draw. The obvious conclusion is that we must attack the problem by trying to prevent delinquency. We can do this by changing those things that directly contribute to its genesis.

First, we have to reduce the incidence of illegitimacy. The rate in 1993 was 71% for blacks and 20% for whites. To reduce the rate of illegitimacy we must teach sexual abstinence in our schools and churches. Teaching abstinence reduces illegitimacy rates dramatically. We must also discontinue Aid to Dependent Children grants to healthy girls and women who have illegitimate children.

Second, we must try to reduce the divorce rate. Forty percent of children will grow up in broken homes. Half of the children in those homes will have psychiatric problems. The problems will often be manifest in delinquent acts. There is no substitute for having a mother and father in the home to properly nurture children. Boy's clubs and Girl's clubs, school programs, day care programs, and big brother or mentor programs will not do it. They may work with a few children, but one cannot spend a few hours a week with a child, and send them back into a chaotic environment. It is all undone in a few minutes when they are back home. The only way to reduce the divorce rate is to begin by making it so expensive that persons cannot afford it.

We can make divorce difficult to obtain by requiring a long waiting period and making the court costs for obtaining one very expensive. We can also make child support very expensive.

Third, we must provide instruction in parenting to the parents of delinquent children. Part of the juvenile justice procedure for dealing with children who have become delinquent, should be to require the parents to attend such instruction.

Fourth, We can do our best to evangelize those parents and children who are at high risk for delinquency. We also need to support inner city ministries to those who contribute most to delinquency and crime.

Finally, we must do something about the alcohol and drug problem. The law needs to make the possession of large quantities of narcotic drugs such as heroin and cocaine a capital crime. We need to increase punishment for all drug related crimes including the sale and possession of narcotic drugs. The minimum

sentence for possession for sale should be five years with no parole. Since the majority of those who sell drugs are also users, all who are arrested should be required to undergo drug rehabilitation that includes a 12-step program. Any delinquent or criminal who uses alcohol should also be required to attend an alcohol treatment program while incarcerated and after they are released. Recidivism should be punished by longer sentences. There is no excuse for our tolerance of alcohol and drug addiction. They are destructive to the addict and to society. Both have their origins in moral turpitude. Both are spiritual diseases and only have a spiritual cure. Their economic and social costs to our society are staggering.

To close, let me say that some of you may think that I am unduly harsh. Crime is a festering sore in our society. It has a known genesis. Society and the church have a responsibility to do something about it. Let's do it!