

The International Family Association Searches for the Origins of Delinquency

Vicki Tatz

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IFA panel members, left to right: Dr. James Breling, James Crawley, Joseph Sheftick, Sgt. Jeunette, Mrs. Kurtzig, Rev. Pratt

Civilized mankind seeks for beauty and inspiration for an inner and outer life of heavenly harmony. Yet we find ourselves surrounded by crime, violence, divorce, unhappiness, and most of all, a lack of trust -- of our neighbor, of our government, of other nations.

The International Family Association, affiliated with the Unification Church International, was formed to promote a more harmonious, trusting humanity. The latest project has been the organization of United Families Against Crime and Violence, which inaugurated a series of panel discussions on Crime and Delinquency on September 10 in Arlington County, Virginia.

The United Families Against Crime and Violence "wants to make it possible for our children to grow and develop as people who can contribute towards making our society and world a place of goodness, free from the fear that prevails in this age," says the group's director, Mrs. Judith Lejeune.

There is good reason for fear if one looks at the statistics. For parents, however, the fear goes deeper than the possibility of being themselves attacked. The figures show that approximately one in every nine youths, and one in every six male youths, will be referred to juvenile courts in connection with a delinquent act prior to his 18th birthday. This is not an easy prospect for parents to face, and the panel discussion on September 10 provided a forum for educators and concerned parents to discuss their appraisal of the problem.

The IF A brought together five youth specialists for the two-hour program: Dr. James Breling of the Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; James Crawley, school social worker in Arlington County; Sergeant William Jeunette of the Arlington Police Department youth unit; Mrs. Barbara Kurtzig, senior counselor, Northern Virginia Counseling Service; and Reverend Benjamin Pratt, pastoral psychotherapist in Washington. Moderator was Dr. Joseph Sheftick of the IFA.

While it was pointed out that statistically most crimes occur in low-income, disadvantaged urban areas, the panelists stressed the relationship with parents as the critical factor in delinquency.

"Apathy, not hate, is the opposite of love," Rev. Pratt stated. "Apathy -- the feeling of being separated, detached from others -- provokes violence and violence provokes apathy. Violence fills the vacuum when there is no relatedness. It's sometimes the only way a person can feel that he is affecting somebody, even if it's by inflicting pain. Violence breaks down the unbearable situation of being alone."

The problems of children he is asked to counsel, he adds, are the symptoms of the problems of the parents. According to studies done on delinquents, the crucial determinants are: the parents' affection, the quality of parental supervision, and most importantly, what he called family cohesiveness (the feeling of all-for-one and one-for-all).

Mrs. Kurtzig urged parents to become aware of the problems, learn what you can do to help community agencies, communicate with your children, and set an example for them. But most importantly, you can care: "When we ask, 'Why can't Johnny read?' or 'Why does Johnny drink?' maybe the answer is that Johnny's dad doesn't love him or Johnny's dad drinks."

Sergeant Jeunette, a member of the Arlington police force for 23 years who has been assigned to schools

since 1963, said, "I've yet to run into a kid who's delinquent who hasn't had a delinquent parent." He went on to say, "Teaching family life and its rights and responsibilities is the job of the parent from the time the child begins to understand," The importance of parenting was also brought out by Dr. Breling's statement that single-parent homes produce three to four times more deviant behavior in children.

Another factor that Dr. Breling stressed is the need for jobs for urban disadvantaged youths to eliminate the economic incentive for crime. Prisoners released with a full-time job waiting for them have a four-times better chance of not returning, he said.

Jim Crawley raised the question of whether a rebirth of moral values is needed on a national scale.

Panelist James Breling had emphasized the economic factor behind crime. But perhaps James Crawley was closer to the truth in pointing to the need for a reevaluation of our national moral standards, a fundamental factor that underlies economics.

"Deviant behavior should be viewed within the broader contexts of the social settings and systems in which the behavior occurs," comments Dr. Saleem Shah, chief of the Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency of the National Institute of Mental Health, in an article in *The Psychiatric Quarterly*.

Dr. Shah pointed out that the President's Crime Commission of 1967 emphasized that "in order to achieve significant and lasting reductions in the problems of delinquency and crime, this nation must mount and maintain a massive effort against the conditions of life that underlie such problems."

With more than 1.1 million youths between the ages of 12 and 17 having serious alcohol-abuse problems, and with births to mothers under 16 rising 80 percent between 1960 and 1973, as studies indicate, it's obvious that the widely discussed moral crisis in America is hitting American youths. More than 50 teenage sex magazines cater monthly to 14 to 19-year-olds, featuring discussions of sex, abortion and extra-marital affairs, according to Rev. Morton A. Hill, president of *Morality in Media*. In many cities, family planning agencies are issuing contraceptives to adolescents -- with or without parental consent.

One child psychologist has commented, "Many adults (are) setting up new standards for themselves, but none for children. It will be difficult for these children in their adult lives to be decision-makers about right and wrong, because without guidelines, they will have no idea what moral concepts are all about."

Television has been cited as one of the chief contributing factors to the "moral crisis." A recent article in *U.S. News and World Report* commented, "Many social analysts are convinced that TV has moved ahead of home, church and school as the principal influence on morality."

The article continued, "What children in the 98 percent of American households owning television sets see is wholesale assaults on traditional values: extensive drug and alcohol use and abuse, violence, sex, greed and gambling."

Violence may occur as often as 30 times an hour during Saturday morning and after-school cartoons. In addition to inciting reenactment of the crimes seen on TV, studies have shown that the repeated exposure to violence numbs youthful heavy TV watchers so that they are no longer shocked or horrified by violence.

Faced by this onslaught, what can parents do? Mrs. Lejeune suggested to those attending the panel discussion that they monitor their children's TV programs and do things as a family rather than just watching TV together. The United Families Against Crime and Violence is also circulating petitions, praising such programs as "The Waltons" and protesting others such as "Hawaii Five-0."

Parents in other localities are protesting the use of textbooks and teaching aids which they say contain unpatriotic, irreligious and immoral materials unsuitable for their children to read. One placard in a West Virginia demonstration read, "We Want Prayer and Bible Reading Back In School."

But we need "Prayer and Bible Reading" back in our homes as well, not just the words but the spirit of living by the Word of God.

If we truly "Love one another" children toward their parents, parents toward their children, and parents toward each other -- then the problems of crime and delinquency will gradually be eliminated and we will be able to establish the world of harmony we are all seeking.