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"ORGANIZED RELIGION AND CRIME PREVENTION"

AN ADDRESS

by

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to be read by

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before the

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The subject on which I have been asked to speak this evening - "Organized Religion and Crime Prevention" - is not the simplest to which I might have been assigned. I cannot, of course, pretend to discuss this topic from the viewpoint of the churches in the sense of their being great religious organizations with administrative policies and programs adapted to their own particular requirements. Nevertheless, I have had considerable contacts with church groups interested in crime prevention since I became associated with the Department of Justice, and I know something of their aspirations and their difficulties. I have also had some experience in dealing with crime and criminals during that period. Out of those contacts and that experience I have learned that the role of religion in crime prevention seems such an obvious one that it is taken for granted, and for that precise reason certain assumptions are often made which do not rest upon fact.

Religion is supposed to penetrate and infuse all phases of human activities; crime prevention is an expression that covers a multitude of techniques, starting with the teaching of obedience and self-control to the child and ending in those remote sociological hinterlands whose rarified atmospheres none but the hardiest dare penetrate. To bring organized religion and crime prevention into a practical juxtaposition, even for the purpose of discussion, is not the easiest of tasks. As a point of departure I have therefore chosen a practical situation that confronts the Federal Bureau of Prisons of the Department of Justice.

There has been no more difficult problem in the whole field of prison management than that of securing inspiring religious services and religious instruction. This has been due in large degree to the fact that when a clergyman associated himself with a penal institution in the capacity of chaplain he became an officer of the prison in the eyes of his fellows and in the eyes of the inmates, and in so doing he lost something of his character as a clergyman. For that reason the Department of Justice decided two years ago that it would not appoint full-time chaplains but would fill vacancies as these occurred by appointing, as visiting chaplains, clergymen who had parishes in the communities adjacent to our institutions. We hoped that by preserving the active affiliation with his church the influence of the chaplain would be enough greater to compensate for the fact that he was not giving full time service to the institution.

Our hopes in this respect have, unfortunately, not been justified and I have, therefore, approved what I believe to be a far better plan. The Department of Justice has enlisted the cooperation of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and The Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students. The Federal Council of Churches will nominate qualified men, who have been especially trained for the duties of a prison chaplain, to fill vacancies which occur in the Protestant chaplain service. Once a man is appointed these organizations will supervise his work, keep in close contact with him and keep him in close contact with the church. A somewhat similar plan has been worked out for the Catholic chaplains. The Bishop of the diocese in which the

institution is located will designate a priest for the position and the School of Social Work of Catholic University is offering special training for the men so designated to fit them for their duties. Representatives of leading Jewish organizations cooperate with us in the selection of Jewish chaplains.

Thus we contemplate establishing the chaplain service on much the same basis as our medical service has been established, through the cooperation of the United States Public Health Service. We see in this the double advantage of having men especially trained and qualified for their work and of maintaining that close relationship between the prison chaplain and his church, which we believe to be essential. The warden of one of our largest Federal institutions, writing to the Department on this subject, said:

"Much of the success attained depends upon the personality of the chaplain and the strength of his own faith and he must be a man in every sense of the word - frank, honest, and truthful in detail, faithful in keeping his promises, sympathetic and above all a good judge of human nature. He must have a genuine interest in human beings and be possessed of a contagious divine faith by which he may lay the foundation for his work, winning the confidence of the men and holding that confidence. He must be inspired with the true purpose of his work."

These qualifications are such that the proper selection of chaplains is a matter of the greatest importance, for all our devices and means of rehabilitation fail unless the individual prisoner upon his return to the world has the will to go straight. The part of religion in the process of rehabilitation must not be limited to formal precepts

and routine services, but must be embodied in the living example of a chaplain who can teach his fellows how to live. As the great Beecher once put it: "The church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians but a school for the education of imperfect ones, a nursery for the care of weak ones, a hospital for the healing of those who need assiduous care."

These principles that govern the religious phase of our work in Federal institutions can indeed be applied with profit to the larger field outside, where the individual, under the terrific strains and temptations of modern life, must be taught to accommodate himself to a complicated economic and social environment. In the community of a hundred years ago, and even more in the community of two hundred years ago, the church played a dominant part in the exercising of those disciplines which operated to preserve social order and to eliminate crime. Many of the offenses now known to our statutory law were left to the administration of the church - at an earlier time through the formal procedures of the ecclesastical courts and later through the informal disciplines of church administration.

Even after the separation of the American colonies, the place of the church in this disciplinary process was well recognized. In the earlier Colonial laws, we even find citation of Old Testament texts as authorities for the major criminal provisions. As time went on and especially with the coming of the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religious worship, the trend was away from the church participation in such affairs. Nevertheless, the church was such a firmly established

community institution and its work so universally participated in by a large percentage of the members of the community that its effect continued largely unabated. It is for this reason that an accurate picture of community life of a hundred years ago will reveal a church which played a highly important role in social control and community discipline.

Most of the children in such communities attended Sunday School regularly - perhaps under protest - and were there taught principles of moral and spiritual conduct which were more or less common to all denominations or sects. Their elders - perhaps because of the absence of golf courses, automobiles and commercialized forms of amusement - attended church services, at least on Sunday, and many of them regularly on prayer-meeting and other nights. The evangelistic revival was a generally accepted community phenomenon which shook the small community to its foundations and affected the lives of young and old alike.

This could not help conditioning the lives of the people of that day, and undoubtedly contributed in large measure along with the home and the school as an effective agency of crime prevention.

Contrast the situation which exists today and the part played by the church in that situation! Many children never see the inside of the Sunday School room. Many of their parents never attend the church or participate in its work in any manner. To a large extent the churches have vacated those interstitial large city areas where community disciplines are most needed and where community leadership is least effective. The very insistence upon the freedom of religious worship has sometimes resulted in emphasizing the unmoral and unspiritual phases of life and

suggesting to the younger generation that the spiritual and moral precepts of a previous generation are no longer effective today. A current attitude upon the part of young people is one of cynicism toward the church as an institution and toward church attendance. Many of the younger generation are highly critical of those who profess church membership and participate in its work.

So long as people were divided into more or less isolated regional or national groups, each with its dominant state religion, it was possible for provision to be made for proper education in the spiritual and moral concepts previously referred to, both as applied to adults and juveniles. Even as to oppressed sects, the very effect of repression was to stimulate interest in their churches and to stimulate in each, young and old alike, an intense loyalty and an intense desire to avail himself to the fullest measure of the riches provided by his church.

With the coming of freedom of religious worship and with the development of various religious sects, one tendency has been to set each against the other, and thus to break down an effective program for accomplishing the end desired by all. Young people, especially, who are used to associating freely with others of many religious sects, are inclined to look askance upon the efforts of their elders to justify this or that peculiar and particular doctrine, with the result that the fine body of vitally important educational material upon which all would agree is, too often, lost from sight.

It seems to me that we must ask ourselves the frank questions whether we can afford to give implied repudiation of the value of spiritual

and moral training; and whether the churches have measured up to their responsibilities. No one who believes that there has been a lessening of church influence can fail to give the most serious consideration to its revitalization. No amount of cynicism can justify the abandonment of instruction in the field of spiritual and moral values unless we are prepared to challenge the validity of precepts that the experience of ages has hitherto demonstrated to be sound.

As to what part the church itself can play in meeting these issues and in answering these grave questions, and as to what the attitude of the communities should be toward these problems, varied suggestions have been offered. If the churches are to exhibit their old-time vigor in the control of human relationships it seems obvious that their personnel must be highly trained for this work.

With the coming of a better trained personnel there would come as a matter of course a more effective organization of church work to meet the present deplorable community conditions. We might expect in a very short time a more adequate assumption of the public obligation to teach the younger generation proper concepts of spiritual and moral conduct. One of the most obvious results of better personnel and better organization would doubtless be the re-establishment in interstitial community areas of effective church organizations, designed adequately to cope with the present forces of disintegration and the lack of adequate capacity for self-discipline which is largely responsible for producing present crime conditions.

Social questions of the gravest import, both spiritual and material, are involved. To the extent that material happiness is increased on earth, to the extent that human intelligence is advanced, to the extent that the agencies which formerly contributed to insecurity are removed, to that extent religion performs one of its real functions in ministering to human needs.

The Government can do just so much. It can attempt to remove the economic pressures and the social degradations that produce crime. It can write statutes and threaten punishments presumed to have a deterrent influence. It can make apprehension swift and certain. It can place criminals behind bars and then strive to rehabilitate them into useful, law-abiding citizens. But Government cannot provide religious instruction. It cannot build character in the individual. It cannot evoke those moral attitudes of self-control upon which the balance of our social structure must ever rest. The problem of the Government is one of dealing with the aggregate of individuals; the problem of the church is one of dealing with the individual himself. And this last problem is the more vital of the two. It is a more delicate problem and one greater in scope than the problem of law enforcement itself; it presents to the churches a challenge that can be ignored at their own peril.

Many of the churches are already outlining ambitious programs designed to attack the program of juvenile delinquency and social disorder, which is resulting in adult crime. Many of them are participating

fully in the work of such organizations as the community coordinating council movement. Many have social agencies participating heartily in community programs for social regeneration. Individual members of the churches have for a long time, and are increasingly, providing leadership in various organizations, both community, state and national in scope. But the greatness of the need gives us a measure of how much remains to be accomplished, how insistent and pressing is the demand for a more intelligent, a better-integrated and a more aggressive approach to this great human problem with its grave implications in our national welfare.

In the activities of the Department of Justice in its efforts to curb crime, we have never lost sight of the fact that calm, dispassionate, thoughtful consideration must be devoted to this question if the plague of crime is to be brought under permanent control. Patience and sacrifice of the sort that characterized the fight of the medical profession against some of the great plagues will be required. Such a long range approach to the problem of crime prevention is not apt to be dramatic, results will not soon be evident, but it is a task that can and must be done. I have said before and I repeat tonight that the summons to enlist in this movement is more than a call to arms; it is a call to patience, intelligence, ceaseless labor and consecration, continued over a long period of time, indeed, as long as the need exists.

The great churches and religious organizations of the United States, comprising amongst their membership persons active in hundreds of different fields and participants in enterprises of the most varied character, can help to sustain this movement. What is needed is not

the intermittent interest of zealous enthusiasts, but rather the assistance of earnest workers of practical experience, forearmed with a program and inspired with a determination that the spiritual basis upon which all Government and all human welfare rests shall consist not of principle and precept alone, but also of the organized efforts of man to help his fellow-men.