

CRIME PREVENTION: A SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

Our society, in common with many others has in recent times experienced a significant increase in many types of crime. Likewise, we as others have turned to law-enforcement, criminal justice and social welfare agencies for solutions to these complex vexed problems. While there is no doubt that these have had some effect in addressing the issues, there are those who seriously question their ability to reach lasting solutions, as in the opinion of many they are not addressing the roots of the problems. I believe it was Thoreau who observed "For every thousand hacking at the branches of evil, there is one striking at the roots".

Numerous theories attempting to explain the causes of crime have been advanced over the years since Cain first murdered his brother Abel . . . yet the answers continue to allude us. Criminal and other types of anti-social behaviour have at various times been explained as being, "neurological" or "psychological" and therefore in the view of some uncontrollable. Others assert that sociological and cultural factors, including poverty, unemployment and social injustice are the main (if not the sole) contributors to the problem. There are those who argue that the influence of alcohol and drugs is to blame, while still others reason that sheer profitability (greed) is the major cause.

There is no doubt that all of the above are contributing factors and if and when these are addressed that lower levels of crime and anti-social behaviour will undoubtedly follow. There is however, in my opinion a more significant factor contributing to ever increasing crime rates, anti-social behaviour and social dysfunction: society's failure over the years to transmit positive values, norms and attitudes from one generation to the next. In the words of Justice Powell (Justice Lewis E. Powell, as reported in *US News and World Report*, 28th August, 1972, p. 41) "We are being cut adrift from the type of humanising authority which in the past shaped the character of our people . . . the more personal forms we have known in the home, church, school and community which once gave direction to our lives".

Historically, families, churches and schools were both responsible for, and influential in, the perpetuation of societal norms and values. The



gradual deterioration of these institutions and the fact that the void has not been adequately filled, undoubtedly contributes significantly to the problems we are now experiencing. There has been in recent times a resurgence of theories which maintain that people "avoid problems" because of their association with traditional institutions. These theories referred to as "bonding theories", are becoming increasingly accepted by sociologists and criminologists as a necessary ingredient to socialisation.

We are in the view of some, rapidly becoming a value-less society and our decision-making is carried out by aggression rather than by reason and democratically established law. If the above is true the implications for society is: transmit values to our children; promote law-related education so that our young people understand both the rights and responsibilities of our legal system; provide and promote quality media productions; maximise the number of bonds and attachments available to citizens from pro-social institutions; strengthen and support families and local communities; and train, educate and constructively counsel delinquents in need of assistance. In summary, we must address the task of revitalising and strengthening the traditional moral and ethical foundations of society.

This is not an argument for the abandonment of, "hacking at the branches" . . . as this undoubtedly has, and will continue to have an impact on crime rates, however, it is an argument to simultaneously "strike at the roots" of the problem. Not until this is carried out will we as a society experience "real" sustainable progress in the areas of prevention of crime and the creation of more just, equitable and secure society.

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