The local church as an agent for curing and preventing juvenile delinquency

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THE LOCAL CHURCH AS AN AGENT FOR CURING
AND PREVENTING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of juvenile delinquency is both dramatic and staggering. It is a national problem, and one in which most people are personally involved. It is a mirror which reflects most vividly the cultural ills of our times, where we find a loss of moral standards, an unnatural emphasis upon conformity, and a preoccupation with the twin gods of sex and security.

Though most life and death problems require expert knowledge before a reasoned opinion can be expressed, this, however, is not the case with juvenile delinquency. Everyone seems to have an authoritative opinion about it. The delinquent is very often "my child," "my best friend's child," or "that boy down the street that I held in my arms when he was a baby."

While lay opinions about delinquency are expressed in simple terms, because the people expressing them are so deeply involved, what they say often has a certain amount of revealing truth. This is evidenced by an awareness of the psychological implications of their statements which give some indications of the delinquent's background.

In this paper our concern is with an interpretation of what part inadequate "behavior-controls" play in the
lives of delinquents, and we will do this in terms of how this relates to disorganized society and what the Christian faith offers as a control for behavior, from which I will draw some conclusions.
II. THE DISORGANIZATION AND BREAKDOWN OF BEHAVIOR CONTROL

A. Definition of Three Disorganizing Factors.

1. Redl and Wineman's Concept. Redl and Wineman found that the delinquent behavior of the children they studied was due largely to the disorganization and breakdown of controls. A very penetrating example used by Redl and Wineman was that of a dam and the force of stored up water behind the dam. If there is trouble in this situation, two things can cause it: (1) the force of the water as being far greater than anticipated when the dam was built, or (2) the faulty construction of the dam itself making it incapable of holding back the normal force of the water.

Two important aspects of personality are dealt with by Redl and Wineman namely "impulsive system...the sum total of all urges, impulses, strivings, and needs...and control system...those parts of the personality which have the junction and power to decide just which of a given number of desires or strivings will or will not be permitted..." ¹

For them, to understand the inadequate control system of juvenile delinquents one must look at the process of

¹Fritz Redl and David Wineman, *Children Who Hate* (New York: Collier Books, 1951), P. 70.
control development in the normal personality. A new-born baby has no set of internal controls. Internal controls are developed only through contact with and adjustment to reality. An understanding of Redl and Wineman's concepts of id, ego, and superego will aid us in comprehending the development of controls during the early years.

The thinking of Redl and Wineman's presentation gives rise to the assumption that it is the job of the ego to decide and to summon the forces to overcome "value-opposed" impulses into submission. There is also the assumption that the superego will be expected to fulfill a double task. It will be expected to represent certain values. It will also be expected to give "value-danger" signals whenever a conflict between value (superego) and impulsive striving (id) is imminent, or when a violation of "value-issue" has taken place.

2. Freuds Concept. We take our cue also from Freud who was the father of the three terms mentioned above. For Freuds the id is the original system of the personality. Its only concern is the release of "need-tension"—avoiding pain and obtaining pleasure. However, since the direct gratification of the "id-need" is not always accepted by the objective word of reality, the ego (the second Freudian concept) develops as a mediator between the id and acceptable objective reality. The superego (the third Freudian concept) is the internalization of external values and ideals. The
internalization of these external values and ideals brings us to the very important process of identification.2

3. The Meaning of Identification. By identification we mean the basic process by which the conscience is developed. It is the internalization of the external values, or education.

Since hatred can block the educational process, as all educators realize, the basis for a good educational process is an affectionate, friendly love relationship between pupil and educator (child and parent or parental image). Yet, we must go beyond this (affectionate, friendly love relationship) to a second process if we are to meet the child’s needs. This is commonly called "identification." During this process the child gives up some of the intensive demands by his readiness to incorporate part of the personality of the parent into the ego ideal and finally into the super-ego. What originally were value demands coming from the outside from another person toward the child are now established as superego demands inside him—his identity.

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B. Stages of Development in the Normal Personality. While many theorists do not go as far as Freud in saying that the first three to six years of a person's life are determinate of his later adjustment, and that all maladjustment can be traced to unresolved conflicts of this early stage, I, on the other hand, believe that these early years are very important for the child's development. The newborn baby has no value, ideals, etc. at the outset; it is during these formative years that they are developed. During these years the child has his first contact with reality—his first interaction with other persons, whereby acquired patterns of reaction are developed, though they may change in later years.

In our society the major personality influence during these years is the parents. Later, upon reaching the school or kindergarten age, the child is forced to interact with his peers until about the age of ten or eleven. The main concern at this stage of the developing personality is leaving the rather sheltered home environment and attempting the give and take of socialization with one's peers at school.

It is upon this foundation that the turbulent, trying years of adolescence must be constructed. We say that these are turbulent years because adolescence involves transcendental steps from childhood to adulthood. Many basic, new questions arise: Who am I? How shall I deal both
with my desire for independence and my need for dependence?
Upon what values must I build my life? To whom shall I
go if I make the wrong decision in life? These are the
kinds of questions which confront the juvenile—questions
which cannot be realized by parents or teachers, but must
be answered by one's own self.

C. Missing Links in the Lives of Delinquents. Why then,
do some persons fail to make the necessary adjustments
from the new born baby, and through the turbulent, trying
years of adolescence to the mature personality? To narrow
this down to a more basic question: Why do some youth fail
to develop those controls that make adjustment possible while
others make the adjustments? The following are some of
the missing links in the experience of those children that
do not make the adjustments.

Firstly, let us look at the missing factors leading
to identification with adults. The predelinquent is not
developed enough to know and understand that the high
standards governing personal conduct are one of the noble
requirements of life; therefore, he drifts toward the
antonym, mis-measurement, mis-conduct; hence, he becomes a
misfit to society.

Another missing factor is the opportunity for and help
in achieving a gratifying recreational pattern. The parent,
the teacher, and the church, can and must give strong and
helpful aid in the guidance and direction of the youth through clean and wholesome recreation. They must remind the child of the better things in life.

At times, there is a lack of opportunities for adequate peer relationship. The department of adults should not be to boss and advise, but listen with an effort to understand youth, showing kindness and love for him until the youth begins to feel that his opinions and thoughts are acceptable.

Also, there might be missing the factor of on-going family structures which are phases of the basic disintegration of the youth's life. In many homes we find this lack. This calls for deep consecration, and dedication on the part of the parents, for the youth knows nothing about the cause of disintegration. Yet he may feel it keenly, but without knowledge to amend it. Therefore the parents should set for themselves definite patterns and standards to work by, making themselves more flexible and loveable.

Furthermore, adequate economic security (one of the basic needs and necessities of life) is often missing. There are only a few things in a home that can be more destructive than inadequate economic security. All parents should at all times stretch themselves to the full length to cover the basic needs of the home. If a child cannot eat like other children, he may drop out of school to work, hoping to secure enough food for himself or to aid his parents. If he is not successful as a worker he may resort
to stealing. And if his situation is magnified by an alcoholic father and/or mother, his anxiety may lead him to greater crimes.

The final factor of missing links is opportunities for making community ties (establishing a feeling of being rooted somewhere where one belongs) where other people beside their parents may know them and like them. The wise parents do not get acquainted with neighbors in the community alone, their children are always included.

This may be done by simply going over to the neighbors' homes as a family and introducing themselves. Later they may invite the neighbors over for dessert as a family or invite them to attend their church or social gatherings.
III.INTERNALIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN VALUE PATTERN
AS A MEANS OF CONTROL

If controls can be developed in the normal personality, and if we can see that the basic deficiency in the delinquent's personality is that he has not developed these controls, we are ready to ask the question—what part can religion play in developing those controls within the personality? And, more specifically, what part can the Christian religion play in this development?

A. Definition of Terms. Let us begin by defining precisely some very important terms that will be used in this connection. First, let us define what we mean by religion. To be sure, there are many good definitions of religion, but I choose to think of religion as "...the individual's organization of his experience into a value pattern which provides a meaningful relationship between himself and the totality of experience." Christianity then as a specific religion offers both a "means" and a "set of value-patterns" around which its adherents can find a meaningful relationship between themselves and the totality of experience. This "means" and this "set of value-patterns" have become enshrined in the

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Christian tradition (value pattern expressed in Christian symbols). Some such traditional Christian values enshrined in creeds are: love as the basic value of all life, each individual life as being intrinsically important, the Creator as concerned about his creation, the brotherhood of all men based upon a common Creator, the eternal value of individual Christian traits such as honesty and truth, and the reality of the believers experience of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Thus the message of the Christian faith, in this context, is that the value pattern of the historical Christian Church is such that, when it becomes a part of one's personality, the basis for a meaningful relationship between the experient and the totality of experience is established.

B. The Church as Means for Internalizing Christian Values.
The mission of the Church is to make possible the "environment" in which a person can come face to face with these values, see their significance for his life, and find salvation through accepting Jesus Christ as the Supreme Value of Life—as both Savior and the Goal of Personality Integration.

Though the goal or primary aim here is to know how personality controls are developed in general, my specific aim as a Christian is to know this so that I and other Christians can be instruments for nurturing and redeeming
souls in God's Kingdom. Thus, if it can be shown that such general moral principles such as respect for other people, a sense of brotherhood, and an awareness of something beyond oneself, though not specifically Christian, can become or are controls, then Christian content can be applied to this general finding.

In order to understand the process of internalizing control, we must return to the concept of identification. Let us take for example, how an individual Christian becomes identified with a group of other Christians—his identified relation in the Body of Christ. To be sure, there is much about the organized Church that is not Christian, and it might be that some of the actions and concepts of the Church are directly opposed to the true Christian goal. For example, one thing that makes the Church a problem for the delinquent is that the Church often views its role—and also a whole lot of other people—as the communicator of the desired Christian value pattern. In viewing itself as the communicator of value patterns, then the Church tends to superimpose its values upon its followers. Thus, in the eyes of the predelinquent, the Church becomes just another authority attempting to tell him what to do and what not to believe. AND ALL DELINQUENTS HATE AUTHORITY. In the youth's rebellion against this and other types of authority, the expected love relationship between delinquent and Christianity becomes a hate relationship, and the process of education (identifi-
cation) with the Church is blocked.

Then, too, if the Church's values are coerced upon the delinquent—accepting them through force rather than through his own choice—the delinquent would not be able to deal with them because there is no genuine indentification. They become a hindrance to future growth rather than an aid. Often the Church superimposes rigid value patterns that the youth cannot possibly uphold; yet he may attempt to do so, either out of fear or desire to please. The continual failures create guilt with which the weak ego is not able to cope. This repeated "failure-guilt" process creates a frustration which becomes detrimental to real religious experience and growth.

Further, when the Church views itself as the communicator of Christian value patterns then the "program-push" of the Church begins. Since the Church conceives of its purpose as communicating to the people, and communication occurs when people come together, then the emphasis is often shifted from "people" to the "variety of gatherings" (committee meetings, socials, subgroups that a Church may have and especially the number of people at the gathering). Thus, if the Church is to overcome these problems of poor communication, it must re-examine its basic mission, and in so doing, it might discover that it is not the communicator of value patterns, but one which is to create the "environment" in which a person can have a Christian value experience. Not
through religious jargon (preaching and teaching) but through the creative setting of the church does God reveal himself. If religion is the "organization of one's experiences," then the Church must become an arena in which one can experience "life"--and not a place where one puts on glad rags. Only when people have experienced "life" and have developed their own value pattern, expressed through "living" Christian symbols, can there be a genuine basis for establishing a process of identification with delinquent or predelinquent personality.

Another important function of the Church to the delinquent--in addition to creating a value "experience" environment--is to make possible an ego ideal. The ego ideal is made possible when the delinquent, who lacks meaningful personal objects of identification in their lives, experience a personal relationship with anyone who can serve as an inspiration, as a model, and as an ideal.

The work of the Church occurs through the relationship between the predelinquent and the appropriate ego--ideal within the Church--those people who have experienced life and have developed their own value pattern as expressed in Christian symbols.

Further, the preventive work of the Church occurs when it opens the way for those experiences which aid adjustment during the developmental stages. During a child's formative years, experiences must be provided largely through the
parents of the child. What role can and must the Church play in setting the environment for the ego-ideal of the child? During these years of early socialization, the Church can provide organized, social activities by which such values as respect for the other person, brotherhood, and individual worth are experienced.

For adolescents, the need for ego-ideals with whom the searching youth can identify is even greater. Often during these vital years of youth, misguided leaders take upon themselves the responsibility of "communicating" religious values and concepts—and, out of the anxiety of their own situations—attempt to thrust upon the youth their own values, religious clichés and magic formulae. During these years, especially, the youth must be met where they are: their questions must be dealt with, no matter how silly or irrelevant they might seem. And, in answering, the greatest mistake that the Church can make is that of thrusting upon these "young ones" meaningless, irrelevant, doctrinaire answers.

Still further, the Church has the opportunity to pave the way for experiences which will fill the missing links in the "love-experience" of delinquents. Those experiences which could help to fill these missing links are evident when one looks at the six missing links. In other words, the Church as the agent of Christ is to help life, and to help it to be more abundant—by helping to fill the void of
these missing links through love. For I am convinced that love is the greatest need of life—and not only for the delinquents to whom Christ sends us to redeem.

\textsuperscript{4}Supra. See p. 7, for a full discussion of the Six Missing Links in Pre-delinquents.
In closing, there are two things that need to be stressed, if the Church is to be effective to delinquents. First, the "program" of the Church, to a large extent, must provide the experience through which the value patterns can be realized by delinquents. The awareness and continual remembrance of this might cause the Church itself to be converted through shifting from "programs-in-themselves" to "people-in-themselves"—its real objective.

Secondly, the Church must set the stage for the delinquent's reception of value patterns which must become the much needed controls in his personality. Such controls are not abstract things that float around but cherished traits which have become flesh and blood, and dwell within him. Only when the pre-delinquent has experienced the incarnation of the value pattern of God, that which was God, and without which nothing is made that was made, can there be any hope for reconciliation of delinquents to God, their neighbors, or to themselves.
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