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Commentary

Viewpoint CHICAGO DEFENDER

The root causes of crime 8/2/95

by Haven Bradford Gow

(Gow is a columnist who has published more than 1,000 articles and reviews in 100 magazines and newspapers.)

The May 22, 1995, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, in Little Rock, Ark., reported the distressing news that "Little Rock kept its No. 1 ranking among American cities in aggravated assaults and finished in the top 10 in three other categories of serious crimes.

"Based on 1994 FBI reports, Little Rock had the sixth-worst violent crime rating among U.S. cities over 100,000 population in 1994 — despite a nine percentage drop in the number of crimes reported by the city to the FBI. Violent crimes include murder, rape, aggravated assault and robbery."

What are the root causes of crime? In a timely and thought-provoking March 1995 study published by the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation, Patrick Fagin, a former inner-city teacher, community worker and family therapist, says the root cause of crime is the breakdown of "the personal aspects responsibility and the inability of refusal to enter into family and community relationships based on love, respect and attachment both to the broader community and to a common code of conduct."

After scrutinizing the scholarly data, Mr. Fagin has come to the conclusion that "at the heart of the explosion of crime in America is the loss of the capacity of fathers and mothers to be responsible parents in caring for the children they bring into the world."

Retired FBI agent William Kelly, who was the FBI's expert on organized crime and pornography, insists that the nationwide epidemic of crime emanates from the rejection and transgression of traditional Judeo-Christian morality and from the widespread denial of personal and moral responsibility.

Indeed, several studies buttress the contention that religious faith and church attendance help people develop good character.

According to a new study by the Washington, D.C.-based Family Research Council, "Church attendance has been shown consistently to deter juvenile delinquency. Two published studies show that frequent church attendees have lower crime rates than infrequent attendees and also associated with lower crime rates. A 1983 study found that the more orthodox a society, the lower the delinquency rate."

The Family Research Council study rightly concludes that "religion gives people faith and hope that there are ultimate meanings and purposes in life. It gives them answers to the great questions of life. It establishes a system of moral duties which have worked. People develop a sense of moral justification from religion, which helps them face temptations, economic deprivation and peer pressure."

Indeed, a "moral compass based on religion guides people to responsible acts of kindness, caring, benevolence and honor."

In his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky writes: "Without God, anything is permitted. But those who believe in and serve the true Christian God know that human beings have been created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, possess immense moral worth and dignity; they also know that the true Christian God has given us the Ten Commandments by which to guide our thinking and conduct, and that there indeed is a heaven and a hell. With help from God, we have the basis for the development of order in our souls and order in the community."