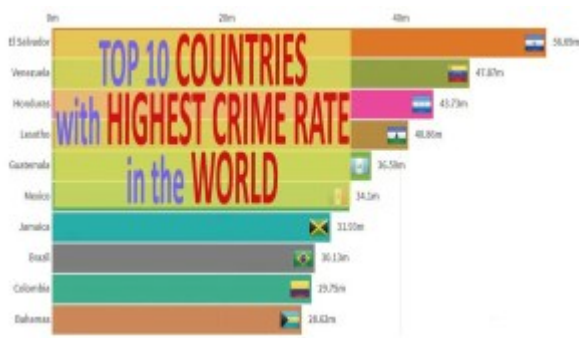


Crime And Religion



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CRIMINOLOGISTS and sociologists have not yet allowed themselves to consider religious teaching as anything but a deterrent against crime. They seem to have omitted from their calculations the possibility that certain religious teachings, far from helping to lessen crime in youths and adults, and among nations, may actually foster it.

Entirely forgotten are the facts of history which prove that more crime has been committed in the name of religion and as a result of the teachings of certain religious systems than under any other pretext. In the nearly 2,000 years of Christianity itself, the most cruel wars, the brutal assassination and torture of millions of innocent people, the degradation and weakening of the moral fiber of countless millions of others, may be attributed directly to corrupt teachings that have been dogmatically taught as consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Even Hitler used religion as excuse for his atrocities against the Jews. "In combatting the Jews," he piously wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "I am doing the work of the Lord."

This has been recently called to our attention by an attempt of an assistant professor of sociology at Catholic University in Washington, D. C., to explain away our statistical and factual analysis of this important matter as contained in our pamphlet, *Religious Education and Crime*. This pamphlet of ours seeks to explain the fact, which no one can deny, that Roman Catholics proportionately exceed those of other religions in our jails and penitentiaries.

We hold that this warrants serious consideration of the fact that not all religious teachings may be conducive to the moral health of human society. The mere suggestion of it, however, seems to have amazed this Catholic sociologist.

The attempt to explain away the facts and figures contained in our pamphlet, *Religious Education and Crime*, was made by Dr. Mary E. Walsh, assistant professor of sociology at Catholic University, in a paper submitted to the

Senate committee during its hearings in April and May, 1945, on S-717, a bill which would have authorized Federal funds for the support of Catholic parochial schools. More than two pages (925-927) of volume 2 of the printed hearings before the Senate committee are devoted to quotations from the above-mentioned pamphlet of ours, while three and a half pages (928-931) contain Dr. Walsh's rebuttal, under the significant title "*A Novel Theory of Crime*." She says in part:¹

"Mr. Lehmann's theory is, I must admit, one that is quite startling, as well as original. The trend of his article is to the effect that religious education, specifically Catholic religious education, is the cause of crime. This theory is one that no doubt will cause consternation to many of his readers. For it is the generally held opinion among constituents of religious groups, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, that religious teaching is a powerful influence toward good citizenship and right acting...

"Certainly any right-minded citizen; who is anxious to help his country in the matter of so disturbing a problem as crime would be willing to read Mr. Lehman's theory in a spirit of fair inquiry. For it may be that he has found an answer to the problem that has escaped the experts. Perhaps he has a solution which will be of great assistance to educators, administrators and social thinkers."

Although admitting that the facts and figures supplied by our pamphlet all from official Catholic sources, and that these statistics show an excessively large proportion of Roman Catholics committed to prisons in all large States, Dr. Walsh naturally does not intend to admit by the above that our "novel theory of crime" has any value. She tries to explain away the official Catholic figures which we quote of this excessive proportion of Catholics in jails by stating that, "there is a much higher registration of church affiliation among prisoners than among the general population." But surely these Catholic prison chaplains who supplied the information on Catholic prisoners would have taken care not to make the number of Roman Catholics in prison appear greater than it really is. That they used their own estimates, rather than figures from statistics of prison registration, can be seen from the fact that the number of Roman Catholics listed in Government reports is higher than that supplied by these Catholic prison chaplains.

Entirely overlooked in Dr. Walsh's criticism of our pamphlet are the proofs we show that Catholic moral teaching may become an incentive to crime, especially theft and robbery. No attempt is made to explain away the answer, of which we supply a photostatic copy, from the official Catholic school catechism, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, that gives "causes that excuse from theft." Nor is there any mention of official Catholic moral teaching that one may steal up to \$40.00 at one time without committing a mortal sin.

The world needs religious teaching today. Education of youth is incomplete without it. But any old religion won't do! It must be a religion that strengthens the moral fiber, that has power really to save, that truly sanctifies and consecrates the individual heart and is a proper guide to conscience. Of more harm than good is a religious moral code, like that of the Roman Catholic church, that merely supplies "reasons" to enable people to break the ten commandments without committing grievous sin.

One of the tests whether a religion is good or bad is its ability to support and propagate itself without an alliance with and special protection of the civil government. That the Founding Fathers of this great Republic knew and acted on this may be seen from the following declaration of Benjamin Franklin:

“When a religion is good I conceive that it will support itself, and when it cannot support itself and God does not take care to support it, so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.”

1. *Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor*, U. S. Senate, 79th Congress, U. S. Govt. Printing Office. 1945, Part 2. pp. 928931.↵