

# JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND YOU

By FELICIANO JOVER LEDESMA

We cannot just cross our arms and close our eyes to the problem.

## THE PROBLEM

Of late, Manila newspapers have dedicated to our teenage problem considerable space in the form of editorials and comments by columnists. There is indeed reason for public alarm over the rise of misdemeanor and criminality among our youth.

The following cases of juvenile delinquency picked at random from the pages of our newspapers during the first four-and-a-half months of this year will give us a little insight into the situation:

January 11 — A boy was mauled by teen-age hooligans near Ricafort and Sande Streets in Tondo.

January 13 — Eight teen-agers were caught red-handed while escaping with stolen groceries in Cavite City. The boys' ages ranged from fifteen to nineteen.

February 7 — Two teen-age boys held up a taxi-driver in Makati, Rizal, and robbed him of cash and valuables. In Caloocan, Rizal, a teen-ager was wounded in a stabbing affray with other young boys. In Kamuning, Quezon City, five teen-agers assaulted a student residing in Project 6.

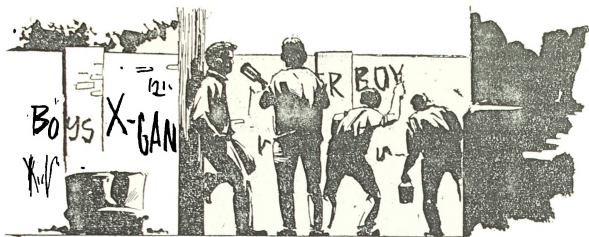
April 12 — Seven youths disrupted Easter Sunday rites in Pinalabanan Church in San Juan, Rizal. They made fun of and mocked a statue of the Sacred Heart.

April 28 — Twenty teen-agers, mostly university students and sons of prominent families in Manila and Quezon City, were arrested by the police in Malolos, Bulacan, after they reportedly robbed a gasoline station in Hagonoy, Bulacan.

These are only a few of the cases that have found their way into newspaper columns. More appear in police blotters, and still many more have not been reported to the police.

Last year some four hundred boys were committed to the Welfareville Institution in Mandaluyong of whom more than one third had been found guilty of theft and robbery, sixteen had been found guilty of homicide and murder, and about the same number had been found

*From a speech delivered by the author before the Manila Rotary Club on May 22, 1958.*



guilty of rape and other crimes against chastity. All of them were below sixteen years of age when they committed those offenses.

Police records show that out of the 18,874 criminal cases handled by the Manila Police from July 1 to September 30, 1957, almost two thirds were committed by teenagers.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are facts culled from news reports and police records. Let us now assess the youth as we see them with our own eyes. On walls of public as well as private property in Manila and suburbs, we see painted in one-foot letters the names of teen-age gangs such as "Stalag Boys," "Invictus," "Texas Rangers," "Hellhounds," "Tisoy Kids," and similar names taken from the titles of American and Filipino movies. These names are painted on the outside of garden walls, on gates and fences of private homes, and on NAWA-SA pipes, in some cases only a few yards from police precincts, as if to taunt and mock the arms of the law.

What of our teen-agers in society? We hear them talk and we are shocked and scandalized. Courteous conversation is not theirs. They talk in "Filipinized" English or in "Americanized" Filipino. Even in the presence of elders and ladies their speech is interspersed with rude and obscene expletives usually beginning with "p" or "h". Seldom if ever do they say "Good morning," "Good afternoon," or "Good evening," even to old people and ladies. The usual greeting is merely "Hi." In dances, the boys do not usually ask the girls to dance. They merely signal or beckon to them with

a wave of the hand or a crook of the finger. Or probably they just grab the girls' hands and drag them away from their seats.

Now I have been generalizing. The inference is that there are exceptions. There are probably more of the well-behaved than the ill-mannered among the youth. But in the nature of things, they are those that go wrong who attract attention and give the rest a bad name.

## THE CAUSES

We have acquainted ourselves with the problem. Now we shall cite what in our considered opinion are the causes of juvenile misbehavior.

This speech might well have been entitled "Juvenile Delinquents vs. the People of the Philippines" because of the following charges the youth could well prefer against their elders:

**First Cause of Action:** We are feeding our youth with the wrong kind of movies. Eight out of every ten movies shown in Manila theaters depict gangsterism, teen-age misadventures, outlawry, and all sorts of violence.

You must have noticed in your own kids how they love to imitate characters in the movies. When a boy sees a Tarzan film, he is Tarzan when he goes home. When he sees a cowboy film, he is a cowboy when he goes home. When he sees a war film, he is a soldier when he goes home. This tendency to imitate is carried by the young child

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into his teens. When we therefore show pictures depicting gangsters and young hoodlums, our teen-agers eat them up and ape them too well. It is not only American films that are showing teen-age gangsterism. Filipino movie producers are now also turning out this type of movies.

Second Cause of Action: We countenance the sale of immoral publications. We see in bookstores and on newspaper stands all kinds of cheap novels and magazines on sex and crime. Then there are the peddlers of pornographic materials of the worst kind who sell their moral poison in the vicinity of our schools. These come in booklet form printed mostly in the Philippines. They contain the most obscene pictures and the most immoral stories.

### TOO LIGHT PUNISHMENT

I was a member of a committee that campaigned against this traffic in pornographic materials. We discovered that these booklets had found their way even into exclusive girls' institutions of Manila. We tried to have the peddlers of these booklets prosecuted. Some were acquitted for lack of evidence. Those who were convicted were fined two hundred pesos and a little more and/or imprisoned for thirty days and a little more. Only that! After the time we gave and the risk we took! We gave up, discouraged and licked.

Third Cause of Action: Many of our government officials have shown very little or no concern at all for the moral welfare of our youth. Before the war, we had a law which prohibited the operation of bars, cabarets and similar establishments within a radius of eight hundred meters from schools. Municipal officials realized that because of that law they were losing government income so pressure was put to bear upon our legislators and the law was amended. Under the law as amended the matter was left to municipal officials. Later on the law was re-amended by specifying a radius of 500 meters as the prohibited zone. This amendment notwithstanding, we have bars on Azcarraga, Lizarda, Gastañeda and others streets only within a sick man's stone's throw from colleges and universities. The whole proceedings, from the amendments to the non-implementation of this law, are clear evidence that in the mind of many government officials, government revenue is far more important than the morality of our youth.

Fourth Cause of Action: Parents are neglecting the education of their children in the home. It is tragic to modern Philippine life when most fathers think that their obligation to their children consists of nothing more than to provide them with food, clothing and shelter, plus an education of sorts. As for the mothers many of them are too busy with social engagements including bridge and mahjong sessions. "Let the school," they say "take care of our children's education." But do our schools provide our children with moral training? They do not, and this constitutes the next charge.

Fifth Cause of Action: Our constitution provides that "All schools shall aim to develop moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, and vocational efficiency, and to teach the duties of citizenship." Note that the development of moral character is first in that enumeration. But if we look at our school curricula, or what some educators term as the minimum requirements but which actually contain the maximum load that students could reasonably carry, we shall find that moral training is definitely not a specific part of education. Before the war we had a particular subject known as "Good Manners and Right Conduct." Later on, this was changed to "Character Education." Now, that subject has been taken out of our curricula. Where is character education? Where is moral training? Some educators say they are integrated with Social Studies and with English and Literature. But is that the kind of importance we are giving to moral training and character building — making them merely an innominate and nebulous portion of other subjects? The Board of National Education has approved a resolution to return "Character Education" and "Good Manners" to the curricula of schools, but this still remains to be implemented. When will it be implemented?

### RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Here is that provision in our Constitution regarding optional religious instruction in our public schools: "Optional religious instruction shall be maintained in the public schools as now authorized by law."

The presence of the word "now" before the word "authorized" has been interpreted by some constitutional authorities to mean that religious instruction can not go beyond what was provided for by the law at the time of the promulgation of the Constitution. It so happens that the law then in force to which this constitutional provision

was tacked, is now emasculated to effectuate the constitutional provision regarding religious instruction. The result is that optional religious instruction is a very dead letter. Actually, very few children in the public schools receive any religious instruction.

What then can we expect of our youth if at home we deprive them of our influence and counsel, and in school we deny them God and moral training? On top of all that, we allow them filthy forms of entertainment and pornographic reading matter. Under the circumstances, how can we justly blame our youth for becoming criminals?

### THE SUGGESTED REMEDIES

We have seen the problem and the causes of the problem. Allow me now to suggest a few remedies.

First: We must ban from our theaters all films of gangsterism, of crime and violence. How? Leave the matter to the Board of Review For Motion Pictures.

Second: We must increase the penalties for indecent shows and for the sale and distribution of pornographic materials.

Third: We must re-amend the law so as to prohibit the operation of bars, cabarets, dancing schools and similar establishments within a radius of eight hundred meters from any school, and give the law more teeth. Persons below eighteen years of age should also be prohibited from entering bars, cabarets, and similar establishments.

Fourth: Parents must be educated in their duties relative to the moral training of their children. For this purpose, parents' clubs, seminars and symposia should be organized. This is a proper, worthwhile project for parent-teacher associations.

Fifth: "Character Education" must be made a separate and definite subject in the curricula of our schools.

Sixth: Our Constitution should be amended to allow a more effective implementation of its provisions regarding optional religious instruction. We ought to admit God in our schools.

Seventh: The scouting movement in the Philippines must be given more impetus. It is noteworthy that according to the records of the Bureau of Prisons, not a single Boy Scout past or present has ever been committed to the national penitentiary, which proves beyond doubt the salutary influence of scouting on the character of the youth.

### SCREAM

A householder who was subject to nightmares advertised in the local newspaper:

"Room and board offered a couple who would not object to screaming in the night."

Before the crack of dawn the following morning, the telephone rang and a woman's desperate voice came over the wire:

"I have just read your ad in the morning paper. Tell me, just how often would you require us to scream?"

Eighth: We must organize youth athletic clubs and have more playgrounds and gymnasia. The experience of Precinct 3 of the Manila Police Department in Tondo where they organized a youth club and furnished the children an ample playground, shows the importance of those clubs and playgrounds in preventing juvenile delinquency. The organization of these clubs would be a worthwhile project for a highly civic-minded entity like the Rotary Club.

### CONCLUSION

Only a few days ago (on May 16, 1958) Carlos Cabrera, a teen-age son of the Managing Editor of the Manila Chronicle, was stabbed seven times, as a result of which he died. While the alleged assailants are no longer teen-agers, there is evidence tending to prove that teen-aged gangsters were behind the murder.

Some of us may have dismissed the newspaper account of Carlos Cabrera's death as just one of those crimes that happen daily. When teen-agers rape or are raped; when teen-agers kill or are killed, we can dismiss each tragedy as just another crime as long as it is not our sons and daughters who are affected. But have we ever thought of the horrifying possibility that those teen-aged gangsters or their victims could have been or could be our own children?

Carlos Cabrera could have been my own son. Carlos Cabrera could have been your own son. We can not just cross our arms and close our eyes to this problem of juvenile delinquency. We must do something about it, if not just on general principles, if not just for humanitarian reasons, then for the sake of our own children.