

Book Review

Why Our Children Are Killing Themselves

By Mauri Saalaxhan. Beltsville: Pub. Writers Inc., 1990, 99pp.

With the ever-increasing menace of drug abuse in America and elsewhere, there have appeared a host of studies seeking to highlight as well as to suggest ways to cope with this global problem. The drug-related crisis with which America is faced has been discussed thoroughly in this book. Mauri's *Why Our Children Are Killing Themselves* is not merely an academic study, but is a pragmatic approach which many readers as well as policy makers and those fighting the drug menace will find interesting, educational, and useful.

The book is a sociopsychological study of an America afflicted by drug abuse, a curse which has hit American children especially hard. With more and more parents themselves becoming drug addicts, American society is witnessing the worst forms of child neglect, all of which are "threatening to produce a new generation of psychologically deformed youths" (p. vii).

Saalaxhan has divided the book into three parts. The first portion deals with the age-old legacy of cocaine use in America and explains how American cities have become ignominious centers of drug-related crimes. The author has used extensive statistical data to highlight the dangerous consequences of drug abuse. Moreover, he is not content with just explaining the problem

per se, but has also dealt with the contributing factors behind the escalation of drug-related violence among American youth. These range from psychological abnormalities to rugged poverty, family disintegration, cultural decay, and moral decline in institutions like schools and churches which once used to play a significant role in nurturing, guiding, and developing the country's youth into well-rounded, healthy, and disciplined human beings (p. 29).

The second part of the book portrays the American family as being under siege and as having lost the sacred significance of familial relations and the value of a two-parent household. The net result has been the complete disintegration of family life. It is no wonder, then, that children are often born to women (without husbands) whose meager resources are not enough to bring them up as responsible citizens. Moreover, some parents are guilty of child neglect, and the number of such parents has already assumed dangerous proportions. This child neglect, which Mauri rightly describes as a "national shame," has given rise to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior. The most terrible aspect of child neglect, however, is that it has led to an escalated teenage pregnancy rate, a major issue of concern now facing American society. The reason for such neglect, according to Mauri, is the capitulatory culture which has swept over America. Addiction to this capitulatory culture has forced American men and women to easily surrender to the desire for instant gratification, usually at the expense of moral imperatives, and for the sake of expediency, which involves neglecting one's duties towards fellow human beings, including children.

The third part is concerned with the author's own solution to the problem. He feels that tough laws and rigorous imprisonment, as advocated by many Americans, are short-sighted solutions. Likewise, paper studies which are hardly implemented, empty prayers and preaching, and self-serving speeches and appeals by entertainment celebrities, prominent businessmen, and public figures would also be of no avail. In his opinion the problem is deep-rooted, and only a well-meaning approach will be able to solve it.

First, Saalakhani opines, there is urgent need for a sincere, honest, committed, and uncompromising leadership which must realize that a "band-aid" approach to this widespread social malaise will not help. Next, the American educational system should be changed and revitalized in order to deal more effectively with this situation. Mauri claims that American schools, contrary to common perceptions, have long been teaching a belief system, "the religion of atheistic materialism: the worship of man's own intellect and limited empirical knowledge" (p. 82). As a result, there has now appeared a new generation of young Americans which is "devoid of sound ethics, values and moral principles," which behaves like "brilliant, psychotic, state-of-the-art criminals and malcontents in many areas of social endeavor" (p. 83). Obviously, this is not the purpose of education; education is the process by

which an individual is taught and led from a primitive state to a higher level of mental development. Such a great purpose, however, can be achieved only when American schools and universities start inculcating religious values and moral principles in their pupils.

And finally, the author says that Americans need to abandon their overriding fascination for the "pseudo-religious culture of atheism" (p. 71) and adopt a positive approach to organized religion, treating it as a blessing rather than a curse. Religion, as he remarks, is the movement of an individual to his/her Lord and Maker, and is capable of playing a significant role in the development of a well-rounded and civilized individual who will be "in complete harmony with himself and his global environment" (p. 70). Mauri is fully aware of the dichotomy between faith and practice, a disease which has adversely afflicted the followers of almost every religion and thus antagonized a great many people. It is with this view in mind that he has urged the American followers of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to purge their lives of glaring contradictions before they embark upon civilizing their errant youths.

Saalakhan's emphasis on religion's civilizing role, especially that of Islam, in bringing about a change in the lives of American youths deformed and misshapen by drug addiction, is appreciable. However, one is compelled to feel that he has not sufficiently explained the Islamic teachings and principles on this count in a detailed manner. But this is not to suggest that his book has failed in its purpose. The book will definitely arouse people's conscience and make them realize their responsibilities with regard to the eradication of drug addiction, a plague which has robbed many American young people of their innocence and turned their hearts of gold into black and cold stones. If such a transformation eventually happens, the author should feel well-rewarded.

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