

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

FA10

PARENTING IS THE KEY TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

'We have been trying to address the issue of troubled children and young people for decades, with little positive change. The problem persists and appears to be growing, as illustrated by rising levels and severity of youth crime. Current government initiatives appear to be focused far more on intervention than prevention.'

'A key conclusion of our report is that these issues have been so difficult to resolve because, until now, we have never properly understood or acknowledged their root causes. We have stuck rigidly to attempts to change behaviour but this is an outcome or product of an individual's state of emotional and social health and well-being. So for genuine change to take place, it has to occur in these areas. Successful parenting interventions, for example, are those which concentrate on improving parent-child relationships, out of which context expectations for good behaviour can be set.'

So says a report by the Early Years Commission of the Centre for Social Justice entitled *Breakthrough Britain: The Next Generation*, published in September 2008

<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/TheNextGenerationReportFINAL.pdf>

The report argues the need for good parenting and observes that: *'At the heart of the many and varied influences on the infant is the family.'*

The report concludes that poor behaviour of children is directly linked to poor parenting and seeks to address the issue without getting into a 'parent-blaming' mode. The report pulls together a great deal of research and evidence to support its case. Evidence is provided, for example, which shows that young children are not as resilient as perhaps they are often assumed to be. Stress induced by verbal abuse can lead to cell death in parts of the brain which deal with social and emotional intelligence and memory.

On educational attainment the report states:

'Inequality in education and learning opportunities is not only driven by a narrow interpretation of "education" and the perception of the availability of "good schools" but also, crucially, by parental attitudes towards learning, knowledge and education, including parents' attitudes to the learning habits of their children. The parents' relationship with their child and therefore the level and degree of their involvement in their children's education is highly influential.'

There is much in this report we can agree with and it is recommended for download and reading. It should prove to be a useful source of evidence to support and advance the biblical position on the vital role that good quality family life plays in determining the moral, physical and emotional well-being of society.

Of course we need to be careful. The report is aimed at addressing the problems of youth crime – problems that the report associates with the poorest 20% of society. All have sinned and fall short of glory of God and even if we dealt with the problems of this slice of society, there would be plenty more to exercise our witness and ministry. In addition, the diagnosis is necessarily incomplete because it fails to account for our spiritual state before God.

The report will contribute towards good policy-making but the root causes of youth crime rates are deeper than poor parenting.

Peter Fearnley

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Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

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