

COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Order out of Chaos – Paper Two

Social Revolution

It is becoming abundantly clear, even to the casual observer, that there is something radically wrong with Britain. The relentless rise in crimes of violence, the sickening scenes of football hooliganism that shame the nation at international venues, the year-on-year rise in drug addiction, the ever wilder scenes of youth partying that appear to reflect a whole generation without moral restraint, the epidemic proportions of sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers. These are just some of the evidence of the social revolution that has taken place over the past 30 years that has discarded the moral values of past generations.

The route taken by this revolution is not difficult to trace. Social change, like changes in the physical environment, obeys certain observable rules. One of these rules is that when change takes place in one of the major social institutions such as the family, the economy, education, the law, or religion, all the others are affected. In Britain we have been experiencing a unique situation since the 1960s in which each of our major social institutions has been experiencing radical change at the same time. This has created a highly volatile situation that has produced the kind of social instability that we are seeing today in which the norms of the past that were the foundation of Western civilization have largely been abandoned.

Causes

Tracing the route of social change does not necessarily expose the causes. Why has society become so violent? Why can we not walk the streets day or night without fear? Why have so many children turned to crime? Why is there so much disorder in society? These are the questions constantly being asked in our newspapers and in the conversation of ordinary members of the public.

But is this the right question? Should not the question be, *'why was society so well ordered, disciplined, honest and peaceful in the Victorian era and as recently as the 1950s?'* Why was it that in the 1950s I was able to live with my parents in a London suburb in a house with a handle on the outside of the front door that was rarely locked day or night and windows were left open without fear of intruders?

Was this the natural state of society or was the kind of society in Dr Johnson's England more natural, where violent robbery was common in the streets and on highways; where more than 100 offences carried the death penalty; where public executions were attended by large crowds who enjoyed the spectacle of cruelty, suffering and death; where violent entertainment was popular – bare fist fighting, bear baiting, cock fighting? In a sermon of 1745 Josiah Tucker claimed that 'the lower class of people' were characterized by 'brutality and insolence, debauchery and extravagance, idleness, irreligion, cursing and swearing, and contempt for all rule and authority.' (*Stability and Strife*; England 1714 – 1760, W A Speck, Arnold, 1988, p 61)

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Natural Order

In the natural world, chaos rather than order is the natural state. Any gardener knows that however beautiful his garden may be, if he walks away and leaves it for 20 years, when he returns he will find chaos. Rabbi Daniel Lapin draws from creation analogies to principles of human behaviour. It was God's act in creation that brought order out of chaos and it is only by following the principles underlying God's creative activity that society can be transformed from its primeval state of chaos to an ordered community of human life. By way of illustration Lapin takes a glass jar and fills it with layers of red and green coloured marbles. He then shakes the jar until all the marbles are mixed together. He asks, 'how long must I shake the jar so as to have the marbles return to their original layers, or to any kind of order in columns or diagonals?' However long he shakes the jar, order simply refuses to emerge out of chaos. From this he concludes that order is not a natural state. It has to be created. ('Ostracism and Disgrace in the Maintenance of a Precarious Social Order' in *This Will Hurt* edited by Digby Anderson, Social Affairs Unit, 1995)

Similarly in human relationships, the natural order of society is for each individual to seek their own well-being and to promote their own good. It is not natural for human beings to seek the good of their neighbours rather than their own self-interest. Human beings are born with instinctive drives towards self-preservation and something actually has to change in human nature to transform a collection of self-centred individuals into a caring, sharing community.

An examination of Victorian society reveals the extent to which social control was exercised by common consent rather than by the enforcement of law. The rate of illegitimacy in Victorian society was extremely low, averaging around 5% of live births, yet there was no law against illegitimacy. Conceptions outside marriage were strongly condemned by social custom. The girl who conceived outside marriage brought shame upon herself and upon her family. Even in the 1950s marriages would be hastily arranged so that the child would be born within wedlock and not suffer the social stigma of illegitimacy, alternatively girls would be sent away to a distant relative until the baby was born or taken into a home for unmarried mothers.

Norms Dismantled

Today, the norms of social control that held sexual promiscuity in check have been dismantled by politicians, social reformers and educationalists. Children have been taught in school, and through politically correct counselling, that there is no particular age below which sexual gratification should not occur. Sex is not taught in the context of marriage or even of faithful heterosexual relationships. The one simple rule is that each child should decide for themselves when it is right for them. The outcome is that young people now go on holiday to the Greek islands specifically looking for casual sex with strangers and in a single night they can have more partners than their parents have in a whole lifetime

Similarly, discipline has been relaxed and the norms governing behaviour and personal relationships within family and community have been manipulated to conform to political agendas. Teachers are not allowed to use even mild physical chastisement and the day is in sight when parents will be forbidden to slap their wayward offspring. Children's rights have been so strongly emphasised that a whole generation of young people are entering the adult world with no experience of firm discipline or teaching in the exercise of personal restraint. A lack of personal discipline easily leads to violent behaviour that leaves its youthful victims stabbed or the elderly brutalized.

Law Enforcement

The only answer that politicians and social policy-makers can conceive is to introduce more stringent measures to enforce law and order; more policemen on the streets, policemen in schools, stricter sentencing, more prisons, more laws covering every type of offence. But this runs counter to the egalitarian philosophy of the age. Instead of self-discipline young people are taught to 'discover themselves' and to find appropriate modes of self-expression. There is thus a basic contradiction in society that leads to further confusion and alienation among young people raised in an environment of moral nihilism. On the one hand they are taught to be aggressive in pursuance of their chosen goals and when they do this they are penalized.

The confusion arises from the policies of liberalization that have been deliberately followed since the 1960s. The outcome is the loss of social values that contributed to the health and prosperity as well as to the stability of society; values such as unselfishness, humility, integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, fidelity, faithfulness, loyalty, and serving the common good. These values do not come naturally to human beings, they are values that have to be taught and appreciated for their worth.

Chaos – the Natural State

Just as God created order out of chaos in the physical universe so he has revealed the rules governing individual and communal behaviour that produce a well-ordered healthy and prosperous society. When these rules are ignored society returns to a natural state of chaos by the same process of corruption that occurs in the physical realm. When beautiful objects crafted by the skill of human beings are left exposed to the elements for hundreds of years they become decayed and corrupted beyond recognition. The order that was imposed upon wood and metal or other materials disappears. The same process of corruption occurs in society, but instead of the change taking place over a prolonged period of neglect it can happen very rapidly in a short period when there is a deliberate imposition of policies of social change through a political programme.

This is what has happened in Britain since the 1950s.

Can anything be done about it? Can the rate of social change be slowed? Can social values that promote health and prosperity be recovered? Can anything be done to strengthen family life and to teach moral values to the young? Half the children in Britain will experience the trauma of a broken home before they leave school. 40% of fathers lose all contact with their children within five years of divorce. 98% of persistent juvenile offenders come from broken homes. Clearly the family is not functioning as the primary agent of socialization in passing on the values, customs and culture - the accumulated wisdom of former generations - for the health and well-being of the new generation.

The Family

Even the present government has recognized that there is a problem with the family in modern Britain. Jack Straw, when Home Secretary referred to the family as 'the building block of society' and said that the government was committed to strengthening family life. A number of measures have been taken in the setting up of government-sponsored family and parenting associations, giving grants to voluntary groups working with the family, and more recently the appointment of a Minister for Children.

Political correctness, however, still reigns and in the summer of 2003 the Government used its huge majority to drive through Parliament two measures that directly undermine the stability of family life. They are the legalizing of same-sex adoptions of children and the repeal of 'Clause 28' allowing the *promotion* of homosexual lifestyles to be taught in schools. They also supported a measure that would have legalised homosexual sex-acts in public toilets. In each of these measures we see evidence of a clash between the government's commitment to promoting minority rights and their recognition of the central importance of stable family life for the health of the nation and for the moral teaching of children. Sadly, political expediency usually triumphs over rational consideration.

It would be tempting to conclude that if government policy was fully committed to strengthening family life and firmly directed towards helping couples to overcome their relationship problems, to deal with their domestic finances and to improve their parenting skills, the divorce rate would be cut dramatically and many of the nation's social problems would quickly disappear. Additionally, if education policy were changed to teach children about relationships and the central importance of marriage for healthy family life, then the problems in the nation would be solved. This, however, is not the case. The starting point of effective social change is neither the family nor education.

Root Causes

The solution to the nation's problems lies first of all in a recognition of the root cause of the present social malaise. We have departed from the God-given revelation of the rules governing a healthy

society. We have thrown away the rule book and we are suffering the inevitable consequences. But such a thing has happened before and in the late 18th century a great movement of social change was instigated by those who recognized the root cause and were prepared to live self-sacrificial lives, suffer personal abuse, and work tirelessly to change the nation.

Eighteenth Century

Two hundred years ago the social scene in Britain was far worse than it is today but a small group of Godly men and women had a vision. They saw black slavery in the Empire and white slavery in the factories, mills and mines of England as the major social evils to be fought, but more importantly they perceived the root causes of the problems that beset the nation. These lay, not simply in the institutionalisation of cruelty, but in the lack of true God-given values. They set about teaching these values and endeavouring to enshrine them in the legal and social institutions of the nation, but above all they lived their own lives by the same values.

Their method was to carry out careful research so that armed with the facts they were able to refute the attacks of those who sought to oppose any programme of moral or social reform. Their publicity through tracts, books and newspapers (which was the extent of the media in those days) attracted enormous attention, as did their relentless campaigning and lobbying of Parliament.

This group of Christians mainly living around Clapham Common and led by William Wilberforce (euphemistically known as 'The Clapham Sect') are now credited with saving Britain from the horrors of the French Revolution and with turning around the whole social and economic situation that paved the way for the prosperity of the Victorian age.

Twenty-First Century

Can such a thing happen again? The answer is that we will not know until we try. The opportunity is there and there is a great army of men and women of goodwill, who are desperately concerned about the state of the nation, who are waiting to be mobilized and are eager for action. If they can be reached and inspired with a vision, have their energies channelled towards clear objectives and given the right kind of leadership, the nation can be saved from the social and economic disaster that is the inevitable outcome of the forces of change that are currently sweeping across the land.

*Clapham Connections is part of a group of organisations seeking to set up a forum for promoting a 'Movement for Community Transformation'. Further information is available from Clapham Connections, Moggerhanger Park, Park Road, Moggerhanger, Bedford, MK 44 3RW
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*This paper is also part of a series of concept papers under the heading **Community Transformation** – see web site or request separate list*

*A **Position Paper** on the work of Clapham Connections appears on the website as well as a **Mission and Strategy** paper outlining a strategy for a movement of social transformation.*