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Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, by Chap Clark

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In this reviewer's opinion, technology has a major impact on a student's achievement and performance. Teachers need to educate the administration and parents on the importance of technology accessibility. Monroe discovered that students' writing improved and students became more literate through on-line discussions and written communications with their tutors. As a result, the author concludes that by using electronic environments, such as e-mail, we can help our students "break linguistic isolation" (p. 61) as they develop their own critical literacies. "Change is only skin-deep without technological and critical pedagogy to sustain it" (p. 116).

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HURT: INSIDE THE WORLD OF TODAY'S TEENAGERS

CHAP CLARK
BAKER ACADEMIC, 2004
\$16.99, 240 pages

Reviewed by Michael Motyl

What do parents, pastors, educators, and youth ministers all have in common? The answer is the desire to deeply understand the reasoning and behavior of the teenager. There has been much research about the behavioral patterns of today's teenagers in an effort to answer the question, "Why are teenagers the way they are?" Often, despite producing undeniable facts about what teenagers are doing, the research does not clearly explain to the reader why teenagers do what they do and think what they think. The educator, youth minister, parent, and pastor can find some solace in Clark's *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Clark contends that adolescence is fundamentally different today than it was in past decades. *Hurt* suggests that there are large numbers of teenagers that have been abandoned by adults and schools, and are not only at risk but are being deserted by well-intentioned adults. Clark provides knowledge and insight as to how to connect with teenagers who are alone and in pain.

Clark spent more than 6 months as a substitute teacher and "participant-observer" in a California high school, compiling data, conversations, and experiences with teenagers. Clark discovered that adolescents live in a world of layers and have "created their own world, a world that is designed to protect them from the destructive forces and wiles of the adult community" (p. 21). Teens live in a world of hurt, betrayal, and distrust, and because many adults have difficulties empathizing with teenagers, they further remove themselves from teenagers' lives, creating a deeper sense of abandonment.

Clark logically divides *Hurt* into three parts, addressing the different aspects of the adolescent world. The first part of the book is dedicated to the theory, explanation, and background information regarding adolescence in past decades. Following those insights, Clark discusses specific outcomes that occur in the lives of youth. This reviewer feels that the heart, soul, and substance of the book are found in these 90 pages, through Clark's attempt to escort the reader into the life of a modern-day adolescent. In the last section, Clark leaves the reader with strategies on bridging the age gap between adults and teenagers.

Hurt serves as a wake-up call to those involved with adolescents, and the initial chapters set the stage, preparing adults for a reinvestment in the youth of today by providing background knowledge about the defining issues that today's teenagers encounter. Clark starts the conversation about youth by defining adolescence as:

a psychosocial, independent search for a unique identity or separateness, with the end goals being a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming and a realized commitment to live with others in community. (p. 28)

Knowledge of the distinctiveness of an adolescent is essential if one is to sustain or maintain a relationship with the 21st century youth. This section assists the reader in realizing the circumstances that have led to teenage feelings of abandonment. It encourages adults to re-examine what they have left behind and addresses the need for adults to engage in youths' ethical and moral belief systems. This "world beneath" of the teen is a deep abyss covered with self-created layers of protection, which adults will have to breach in order to reconstruct what has been lost in the abandonment of our youth.

Clark explains that before we can break through into this private world, adults must comprehend the implications and consequences of this new realm. This move from the abstract to the tangible is the mission of the second part of *Hurt*. This section of the book unravels the lives of teens and explores "how mid-adolescents make decisions about issues such as ethics,

sex, busyness and stress, family, and alcohol” (p. 72). Clark has the unique capability of bringing an unknowing adult into a foreign land, while making great strides in bringing the teenagers’ lives closer to the adults. In discussions about peers, school, and family, Clark illustrates the gaps between the adult and teen, while concurrently reminding adults of their call to care for the young, in respect to the many issues that reside in the “world beneath.”

Regarding peer groups, Clark is tuned into how high schools are inhabited with “clusters,” or smaller groups of friends who “navigate as a unit the complex network of social interdependence with a loyalty similar to that of a family” (p. 74). *Hurt* accurately explains the complexities that arise when adults attempt to understand the characteristics of clusters, because they are different from what most adults have experienced. The purpose of this explanation is to encourage the adult to honor what is important in the life of the teen, no matter how confusing or foreign it might seem.

Clark identifies teenagers’ outlooks on schools as being places of anonymity and inferiority and discusses schools as systems that have necessary expectations that must be met. The successful students learn at an early age how to “play to” the expectations. Clark preaches that students are not actually being assimilated into the adult world, but rather simply learning how to conquer the system. This reviewer feels that this raises the awareness of the adult reader to devise ways of encouraging teens that have fallen prey to misconceptions about school, in order to facilitate their growth.

The author offers sound advice to parents about their role in their children’s lives and outlines two vital strategies to aid parents in understanding teenagers and their world, providing them safe and secure boundaries while still allocating room for growth. This area of *Hurt* contains information that can rock the foundation of a family that presupposes all is well, expressing the various inadequacies of both neglectful and nurturing families.

Clark asserts that every child thirsts for authentic, intimate relationships with adults until they have completed much of the adolescent process. This reviewer feels that Clark provides ample strategies for adults to implement to change the tide of abandonment that has been created. The author suggests the following: those who work with youth should be trained in the changing youth culture, those who serve adolescents must work together, those who serve adolescents must understand youth and provide boundaries, parents need to be equipped and encouraged to parent the changing adolescent, and communities must make sure that each student has an adult advocate who knows and cares for him or her.

In an effort to herald a crisis among our teenagers, *Hurt* proves to be easily readable. Some critics might believe this work is simply a glorified diary, neither definitive nor complete in its information and solutions. Parts of *Hurt*

cannot help but be idealistic; however, those elements can be used as a springboard to additional ideas. It is striking to see Clark deliver a manner in which teenagers express their feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, in a way that adults can respond proactively in an effort to heal the wounds.

Due to the poignant material, *Hurt* is not a fun read, but it facilitates our understanding of what the youth of today are encountering, so that we may be more deliberate in supporting them in the future. Despite the distressing content, readers will be lured into a more steadfast passion to care for the young of their communities. This reviewer strongly recommends *Hurt* to all those involved in secondary Catholic education, teachers and administrators alike. Clark says, "We are called to declare God's power to the next generation, however this becomes difficult in a changing world and community context" (p. 190). Catholic school teachers and administrators are committed to reconnecting young people to the Lord and this cannot be done without a commitment to reconnecting the young to the collective faith community. Clark equips educators with tools that allow them insight into what teenagers feel and how they cope with these feelings, allowing them to better invest in the lives of today's youth.

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