

Vicar's Letter

Dear Friends

The riots last month were not about cuts, poverty or race, according to the Prime Minister, but about the difference between right and wrong. David Cameron described the violent disorder as “wake up call for our country” and bemoaned ‘Breakdown Britain’ stating that a “slow-motion moral collapse ... has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations.” For those who take the Bible seriously, that is no surprise.

It is hard to argue against some of the reasons proposed for the disturbances: There is an enormous and apparently growing inequality in British society; there are many young people who are alienated and hopeless; personal identity and worth have now become so bound up with the accumulation of consumer goods, that the opportunity for those who lack them to take them was irresistible. It is no accident that the primary targets of the looters were clothing and jewellery stores, and those selling electrical goods.

But these explanations are still too superficial. The reality is that breakdown in society has roots that go much deeper than politics and economics.

For two generations it has been fashionable to sneer at Christianity and to consider it unnecessary for a modern civilised society. But the consequence is that the nation has lost the Christian faith as the glue that held the British social fabric together. The result has been a moral vacuum and amongst the noise of sirens and breaking glass we ought also to hear the sound of chickens coming home to roost.

I have written before of the impact of the Evangelical Revival in the 18th century when the state of society – and indeed the Church of England – was far, far worse than it is today. Yet by the middle of the 19th century all that had changed. The cause? The tireless efforts of men like George Whitfield, John Wesley, William Wilberforce and many others motivated by their faith to spread it and to serve their neighbour. Indeed it has been estimated that three quarters of charities and societies set up to work for a better society and ameliorate the situation of the times were of Evangelical foundation. Arguably the reason we were saved the chaos of revolution lies in this transformation that the gospel had brought to the nation.

The Prime Minister may diagnose the causes, but the prescription requires more than a few headline grabbing initiatives. We desperately need the transforming good news of Jesus Christ to grip our nation once more.

It is the Bible which challenges those in power to govern honestly and to give all they can to those in poverty. It is the Bible which encourages the poor to work hard and, whatever the injustices, to respect and obey those in authority. It is the Bible which encourages and commands love and care between individuals and in doing so, creates bonds that tie society together. But most of all, it is the transforming grace of Jesus Christ that gives people the power to resist temptation and live a better way, just as he intended.

With every blessing
Philip de Grey-Warter