

Dear friends,

The riots that took hold in several of our cities and towns last month left many of us struggling to understand the full implications of what took place. The breakdown of law and order on the scale we witnessed is unprecedented in recent times and the wanton vandalism, theft and damage both to people and property was almost beyond belief. I feel that the forces of law and order handled a difficult and dangerous situation in an almost exemplary way. There are those who in hindsight might have done things differently, but hindsight is all well and good but in the heat of the moment actions are taken as seems appropriate at that time.

I am certain mistakes were made, but the events and circumstances that surrounded them were not occurrences of a every day nature, but senseless and mindless actions of a very small minority that sadly have grown outside of the laws of decency and tolerance.

These are very serious and dangerous times that both our nation and the world faces. Growing financial instability, conflicts raging in several countries, natural disasters are all compounding a general feeling of despair, concern and worry. Many members of our society face uncertainty at work and with high inflation, spiralling commodity costs and pressure on household budgets people are worried and rightly so.

Politicians and social observers have all now started to look at the under lying causes of the recent problems that erupted on our streets, and there are very many deep seated issues that will take more than a generation to resolve.

One question that we might consider is what part has the decline in Christian ethics had to play in the moral collapse of our society. Only a generation ago most people in this country grew up in an essentially Christian atmosphere, and as such we all took it for granted what we perceived to be Christian notions in human conduct.

We live in a very different world now, many from a generation or so ago would hardly recognise the ethnic mix in our country and the wide and divergent range of cultural and religions groups. What we must do is accept that the changes that have taken place are here to stay and we must also be thankful that none of the acts that have recently taken place were either racially or politically motivated.

However where does that leave us with the question about the role of the Christian Church in our society today. Since the end of World War II, the Church has been in almost terminal decline. Its opinions and teachings are now largely ignored as successive governments have striven to suppress the role of the Church in the national life of this country. Some might claim that we are still nominally a Christian society, but in reality we no longer are, we are nothing more that a tolerated Faith group whose opinions are heard but in many cases no longer welcome and that sadly applies more to the state church than any other. The speech given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the House of Lords, immediately after the riots, did little to inspire any confidence whatsoever.

The truth is we are seeing in our society today a widespread repudiation of Christian standards of Conduct and Morality, and the Church obsessed as it has been for decades with internal strife and division has done scant little to help its own cause, it has been almost the author of its own downfall.

There is a growing and pressing need for the integration of Religion, Art, Science, Politics, Education, Commerce and Finance to bring together into a unity of agents of a single purpose. That purpose cannot be found in human aspiration; it must be the divine purpose. That divine purpose is actually presented to us in the Bible as the Kingdom and Sovereignty of God, or as the summing up of all things in Christ Jesus, or as the coming-down out of heaven of the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

In essence our thoughts should be directed to bring about what are in the first place the priority of God and the universality of scope. Nothing can be omitted, but it is in Christ that they are thus all gathered into one. All nations are to walk in the light of the holy city including ours, but it comes down out of the heaven from God. The Kingdom of which we speak and pray is the goal of all human history, none more so than now as we struggle to comprehend the challenges that lie ahead. But remember always in your hearts and minds that it is His Kingdom, not man's.

Change is required, and change is coming.

May Almighty God bless and keep you all.

Yours in Christ Jesus

Father Ian Gray.

