

Calamity in the city

If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*? Amos 3:6

The background

The word calamity is really the Hebrew word for 'evil'; and surely we have seen pure evil manifested in the behaviour of hundreds of thugs in England's cities last night (8 August 2011). Consider: a family furniture business, that survived two world wars intact, was burned to the ground in a fire so huge that the fire brigade could only stand and watch. Consider: a local community children's charity shop was torched and looted; adult women also looted baby clothes from a nearby store. Consider: fires started mindlessly in shops below three floors of flats occupied by families forcing one woman in Croydon to leap from the building into the hands of onlookers. Consider: restaurant windows smashed in upon diners; followed by violent looting around the cowering customers. Consider: a young mother holding a baby and cowering behind her front door in fear whereupon it was smashed down and thugs snatched the baby out of her arms and ran away. It took an hour before the police recaptured the child. The only suitable word describing all these events is 'evil'.

Without doubt, the recent national outbreak of rioting is a new type of uprising and the latest low-point in the destruction of British society. It was organised by modern technology, quickly mobilised in large enough numbers to outsmart and overpower the police and comprised mostly of teenagers, and some people as young as 9-years-old. Amoral thugs now know that if they can generate enough numbers, they can overpower a locality and cause destruction and looting before the police can do anything, whenever they want.

But what is the Christian to say about all this? What is going on? At the very least one has to say that a nation experiencing these events, to say nothing of the events being repeated day after day, is a nation in serious trouble. Britain is in serious trouble.

God's sovereign judgment

The very first thing to do is to confirm God's sovereignty. These events are not mere accidents of mindless opportunism or copycat rioting; they are the outworking symptoms of larger problems shoved under the carpet, which the Lord God has now acted upon. Scripture confirms that evil in a city is under the sovereign control of God and occurs for a purpose. It is the task of thinking people to consider what this purpose is.

There are two key aspects. The first is what God intends to achieve by the social unrest; the second is the underlying causes that resulted in God's allowing of this rioting.

When God allowed Judah to be captured by the king of Babylon and for its people to be exiled into servitude we see these two aspects. The first was that God intended the exile to be a punishment of Judah's apostasy and rebellion and to create a platform for repentance over the 70 years of banishment. The exiles that returned were of a different ilk to those that had been captured; they wanted to hear the exposition of the law by Ezra and wanted to get things right and restore the fortunes of Israel. Those who did not remain in Babylon and died there.

The underlying causes of the exile were many and varied and are exemplified in the judgments of the prophets upon the kings and people of Judah over centuries. Chief of these was the syncretism brought into the worship of the land. The main sin of the people was spiritual adultery, combining pagan, Canaanite, religious rituals with the worship of Yahweh. Coupled with this was the social exploitation of the people and the corrupt governments that abused power. Consider Ezekiel 34 or Isaiah 58 alone for a condemnation of this. Failure to protect the people and govern in righteousness was a chief sin bringing forth judgment.

This establishes a precedent, often seen in Scripture and not just restricted to Israel. When a nation fails to govern righteously God is initially patient but eventually chooses to act in judgment. This judgment begins with making the rulers act out stupid policies – they make all the wrong decisions – and eventually some sort of national consternation erupts, of varying severity; the worst case being a war which is lost.

Even nations that God used at one time later come in for judgment when they govern unrighteously. Assyria, that was used by God to judge Israel (the Northern Kingdom) in 586 BC, is itself judged for its brutality, wickedness and hubris. The Babylonian Empire, which was used by God to discipline Judah (and even though it had one converted king), is later overtaken by the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medo-Persian Empire that brought the release of the Jews back to Israel is in turn overwhelmed by Alexander the Great for its sins. Alexander's sins and hubris led to an early death at 32 and the empire being split into sections amongst his generals (the *Diadochi*, 'successors'), whereupon it was later superseded by Rome.

In this present crisis we also have to ascertain what God intends to achieve by the social unrest and what are the underlying causes of the anger that precipitated the rioting.

A key factor is God's judgment of the UK

It is important to bear in mind that God is angry with this nation and particularly with the rulers of the nation in the last 40 years. British governments have repeatedly adopted strategies and enacted legislation that were, bluntly, unrighteous. The Christian principles that undergirded British common law and English parliamentary operations for centuries have been completely repudiated. Sins that the Bible condemns outright have been legalised and encouraged. On top of that there has been a continual and systematic abuse of power against the people; whether in the form of abuse of civil liberties, spying on innocent people, unfair taxes, lying propaganda, and much more. This is to say nothing of illegal wars, criminal hypocrisy of parliamentarians and formal political alliances to the detriment of the people of Britain (e.g. EU membership).

Added to this has been the massive waste of money spent in the name of political correctness, failed policies and unnecessary club memberships. On the day that the riots were hot news it was reported that a British council had paid for five young criminals to have a day out at Alton Towers. We waste nearly £50 million a day being in the EU, which then forces us to wreck our fisheries industries, our dairy farming and our agricultural security. The EU also forces us to duplicate or triplicate local government. Few realise that part of your VAT tax goes to pay for a completely unnecessary and unelected regional system of government in the various EU allocated regions of the UK, to say nothing of the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies paid for by English taxes. Various authors have costed the facts and state that trillions of pounds have been wasted by politicians in the last 15 years alone. Government is filled with quangos and n.g.o.s that duplicate or triplicate policies.

For example: in recent days we learned that the magnificent Harrier Jump Jets, one of the most versatile aircraft ever made, were thrown out by the Tory government after billions had been spent refurbishing them to a very high standard. They were sold to the Americans for a measly \$500,000 who lapped them up fast. Now consider this, the Americans have some of the best fighter aircraft in the world. Why would they want Harriers when they have F15s, F16s, F18s and F22s, plus many others? The answer is that Harriers can do jobs that none of these can (except the Raptor) and are exactly the thing we need to fight current types of wars. We gave away something useful for our own security. Then consider the NHS global computer system for medical records. This has so far cost £2.7bn and is now six years overdue but still requires a further £4.3bn to sort out. Government is now considering scrapping the whole mismanaged project. At the same time the NHS is rationing surgical procedures to save money, such as hip and knee replacements and cataract operations. Money that should be used to alleviate patients in pain has been doled out to IT contractors who didn't even do the job they were paid for. But we digress.

In every area of management, subsequent British governments have squandered taxes, acted corruptly, engaged in foolish, expensive and illegal wars (including military action in Libya), abused the people, pursued unrighteousness and dishonoured God's laws which they formerly accepted. Such a nation cannot go unpunished. [This is without saying anything about the abuses of the criminal justice system, problems with policing, unfair sentencing, illegal immigration, tax avoidance, benefit abuses and so on.]

Furthermore, the various governments have become more and more distant from the people they are supposed to represent; modern governments (of all stripes) are simply out of touch with what the nation wants and requires. A couple of years ago a certain politician asked for policies to be sent to him via the media promising to introduce a private members bill to enact the most popular. When that turned out to be capital punishment he reneged and stated that that he knew better than his constituents. Parliament is also embarrassed that a government website of e-petitions has also shown that a popular request is the return of capital punishment (20,000 petitions), something Parliament cannot introduce due to its EU treaty commitments. In fact it is widely known that the majority of British people want us to leave the EU (just as many European people do) but this is never allowed for consideration, despite previous promises of referendums. Neither is the EU policy on immigration, that we are bound to, acceptable to most British people. Parliament has ceased to be the voice of the people and is really the voice of the supra-national world powers that control nations – the bankers, corporate heads of global enterprises (commercial and political) and military leaders. [For more information on God's judgment of Britain, see my paper of that name.]

God has demonstrated great patience with Britain, possibly due to the godliness of many of its previous citizens, but his patience has run out and his escalating judgments have been seen in recent years, culminating in yesterday's riots – something never before witnessed in history.

The problem of the recent social uprising

The general societal problems underlying all this – the production of amoral, social misfits

David Cameron admitted that there was a serious problem in society in that it could produce a legion of criminal thugs rampaging across the country. His statement on 10 August regarding the heart of the disorder included mention of, *'Things are badly wrong in our society ... pockets of society are sick ... parts of society are broken ... a complete lack of responsibility in parts of society ... [people who feel that] their rights outweigh their responsibilities.'*

This is an apt summary of the problem, (some of which are due to his own policies) which can be identified in the following strands.

Individualism

The rioters feel no inclusion in society but, apart from a loyalty to their own gang, embody a proud individualism. They have been brought up through the education system being told repeatedly that they have rights and have not been developed into having any sense of responsibility. This is a key failure of the whole education system in the UK.

This sense of 'my rights' is not only infused in them didactically in teaching but is illustrated in all the levelling aspects of school. Any sense of competition has been denuded, even from sports days. Everybody must have prizes and no one is a winner. What this does is teach people that they do not have to strive to gain an objective; everybody will be cosseted. This sense of 'no one wins' begins even in the earliest days of schooling and removes any sense of needing to better myself through competition or effort.

By the time people come through the education system they have a very strong sense of individuality and ownership of their rights. Frequently we hear kids say that you must give them respect before they will give you respect. The truth is that some people deserve respect because they have authority – parents, teachers, head-teachers, police officers, employers etc. In a recent TV experiment with failed students in a new-start school programme (established by Jamie Oliver) the kids repeatedly failed to see what a brilliant chance this was offering and what a huge cost was invested in them. Instead the head-teacher was given abuse by young girls who said that that he was not better than them and so they had no need to listen to him. Wrong! The head-teacher was better than them, had implicit authority and they did need to listen.

Kids come out of the school system thinking that the world revolves around them and that they are better than everyone else when they have yet to achieve anything. Their education told them that they did not need to compete to achieve anything at all; they had implicit rights as individuals. There was no sense that they had to earn respect or even earn a living. Consequently when they come out into the real world and realise that they had no money, many of them turn to crime to feed their urgent desire for material goods.

Much of this reflects the philosophy of various liberal, self-esteem psychological approaches that have dominated school programming and other areas of society. The focus on self always leads to selfishness whereas Biblical morality focuses upon selflessness and serving others. This point of serving has been utterly lost in the education system.

Failure to discipline

This is the overwhelming root of the problem. The Bible (plus universal history and common sense) tells us that that children need discipline and that this discipline must hurt. That is, it must include moderate corporeal punishment when justified. Some children take naturally to development and so need little discipline just encouragement; however some children require much discipline.

The removal of corporeal discipline from schools and the strong discouragement of discipline at home has done untold damage to generations of kids. Parents are frightened even when they want to discipline children since kids can now sue parents and report them for abuse. Councils are very quick to act when children claim to be abused. However, kids need boundaries when they are growing up; they need laws and restrictions. They need to know when they are doing wrong. Actually, child psychologists (and experienced parents)

know that kids actually desire this (though they may not express it); they want to know where they stand and this gives them security to express themselves.

Kids who are not disciplined never learn to conquer their inherent character failings and these get stronger as they get older, sometimes resulting in criminal behaviour.

Many modern parents have no clue about this and feel that the way to love their kids is to give them everything they want. Instead of bringing proper punishment, kids get rewarded for bad behaviour. Despite a tantrum they receive gifts. This teaches them that they can get what they want in life if they push the right buttons. The failure of modern parents to understand that loving kids sometimes means punishing them is a significant factor in social breakdown.

Lack of parenting

In addition to the matter of discipline is the issue of proper parenting. Most modern parents have abrogated their responsibilities in favour of the state. They trust that schools and institutions will bring their kids up for them. Now some people are just too stupid to think any differently, but there are also very sensible people out there who also abrogate responsibility due to lack of time or a very busy job. I have known of a family where the parents were both doctors who spectacularly failed to bring up their children properly and cared little for them, sometimes even failing to provide food for them. All this has repercussions on the kids when they grow up.

Another factor is the side-stepping of parental authority by the state in prescribing the contraceptive pill for girls as young as 13 without telling their parents. This, along with the sexualising of children from an early age by the state and the easy access to pornography, has led to an explosion of pregnancies in teenage girls. These children grow up without a father and with mothers who are ill-equipped to parent (with some notable exceptions). Thus these children become alienated and socially ill-equipped themselves from an early age, becoming troublemakers later.

Alienation

One chief reason for the alienation of the young is the lack of jobs. It is noteworthy that In Tottenham (where the riots began) unemployment is 18% but in richer areas of the borough of Haringey, such as Highgate, it is only 5%. Youths with no jobs are aggrieved and have time on their hands to make trouble to express this anger. A big mistake was made in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher to emphasise greed and corporate business. During this time British manufacturing industries fell to pieces with the concurrent lack of manual jobs for school leavers without qualifications. At the time when possessions were heavily emphasised in advertising, many young men were dirt poor with no job prospects. This made a breeding ground for resentment and also a dependence upon state benefits. The next generation of youth born into these circumstances are now venting their spleen.

Subsequent governments all made the mistake of not fixing this lack of manufacturing jobs, instead focusing on the quick fix of service industries and deregulation of financial enterprises which led to the country's economic downfall. What is always needed in society is a mix of jobs. Many school leavers will not go to university (seen as a panacea by governments), but today even graduates can't find jobs. What is required is manufacturing industries to be encouraged with grants and aid to actually make things (something Britain is good at) and supply apprenticeships for kids who want to work but are not academic.

For instance, it makes sense to support manufacturing industries supplying decent products that would otherwise be outsourced to India, Taiwan or China (say, Dyson

vacuum cleaners). Give them support to stay in England and get them to provide apprenticeships for young people as a condition of the grants. The money saved from reduced unemployment dole would pay for the grant and also the tax returns would be increased.

A more draconian measure for school leavers who have no chances of a job and are likely to remain on benefits for years is to impose automatic conscription to the army for two years in order to get further benefits. In this scenario they would not only be trained and disciplined, but would provide a service to society in doing so.

Lack of preparation for practical use in society

There is a spectacular failing in schools, which everyone knows about but which is never formally admitted. Instead we are told that marks for GCSEs continue to rise year-by-year. This tells us nothing about students who fail to get any qualification, or don't even sit exams, and in any case no one believes the statistics. Professionals have told us that exams are being marked up under political pressure and standards dropped.

What is certain is that even qualified students have an abysmal grasp of education in the main. Oxbridge universities have established remedial courses to prepare undergraduate students with A*, 'A'-level qualifications but who are deficient in reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as personal expression. Managing directors are repeatedly telling us that graduates seeking employment are un-employable and that many cannot even write a letter or hold a proper telephone conversation. Yet these are the best students coming out of the system.

At the other end of the scale we have illiterate teenagers who do not even have enough understanding of life to even poach an egg and make toast; thus they live on take-aways and kebabs (this is why kebab shops have vastly multiplied in the last 20 years in every town). The fact is that 17% of 15-year-olds are illiterate. Nearly one fifth of teenagers cannot read or write properly. Now since girls do far better than boys, we can extrapolate that most of this 17% is male, making the proportion far higher of 15-year-old boys. It is boys like this who are predominantly taking to the streets. Young men who are illiterate do not stay at home and read books or even comics, they go out to find entertainment in the streets.

Schools, for many years, stopped many of the practical courses that used to prevail. Domestic Science vanished from the curriculum years ago (though it has re-appeared just recently) which at least gave young women the chance to learn basics of cooking. It is now common for teenagers to be unable to boil an egg. On showing a certain 14-year-old how to cook an omelette he said to me, '*What's that coloured stuff?*' as I sprinkled herbs and spices. I have seen young women say that they could not tell when water was boiling. In many schools woodworking and metalworking courses have been reduced or eradicated due to the expense. Yet these often formed the basis of a future job in manufacturing or construction for boys who were not academic in the 60s. Being prolific in these courses would have once guaranteed you a job or an apprenticeship.

So many kids come out of school not only with no academic qualification, but without any practical wisdom either. They literally finish their education as morons. To make things worse they are subjected to constant adverts thrown out by a consumer society which tells them that they must have this and that. This is a recipe for anger.

No national faith in absolutes

In the past certain actions were unthinkable because everyone had a faith system of some sort. Part of this faith was the submission to certain moral absolutes; thus even barbarian tribes treated their old with respect and sacrificially defended their own community. It used to be considered that the strength of the British Empire was its foundation upon Christian principles. When asked what was the foundation of her empire by an Indian prince, Queen Victoria picked up a Bible and said, 'This'!

Today such moral absolutes underlying society have disappeared; many having been wrecked by governments. Thus the sanctity of human life was overturned when Parliament enacted the legalisation of abortion on demand. In addition to the actual legislation of sin by governments, the public also sees repeated images and scandals of MPs who commit grave acts of unrighteousness, such as the expenses scandal. Further, the overwhelming adoption of evolution theory as a fact, taught as such in schools and colleges, always leads to the destruction of moral behaviour since it upholds that 'survival of the fittest' means you fight for your own interests against the needs of others. [Hitler was a great fan of evolutionary theory and used it as a platform for his unthinkable racial crimes.] This undergirds much current thinking and it promotes unrighteousness. If I am just an animal with no absolute moral compass trying to survive, and my survival depends upon obliterating my competition, then the result is lawlessness.

So young people grow up with no moral boundaries, being taught that they are but lucky animals who can act as such, heavily influenced by celebrity icons who demonstrate selfish and destructive behaviour. Then they see pillars of society, such as MPs, behave in greedy criminal ways; so is it any wonder that they choose to behave amorally? Kids today have no moral restrictions because they have no moral absolutes.

Violent media

In addition to having no moral restriction in principle most kids today, certainly most males, have been inured to violence as a result of their consumption of ultra-violent video games. If you feast yourself on unreal level of violence you gradually diminish any sense of reality about the results of violence. Blood and guts become so normal that the conscience becomes seared. This is the only explanation of the levels of violence perpetrated by young people today. I have seen CCTV footage of youths attack an old man in a bus stop and after throwing him to the floor and punching him, they repeatedly stamped on his head. A teenager in Wales some years ago broke into an old lady's bungalow to steal her pension and then killed her, ripping out her rib cage in the process. Such crazy levels of violence are sadly commonplace throughout the country these days.

The result of spending long periods watching ultra-violent games is amorality; a complete lack of any moral scruples at all. This is why mobs can do the things we have seen in the riots recently – set fire to houses where families are living, snatch a baby from a mother's arms, steal from a wounded man lying in blood on the floor. These people are amoral. There is no doubt that they are amoral, what is important is to understand why they are and then do something about it.

Lack of facilities

The facilities for children and teenagers in a community are the means of developing a relationship between the kids and the community. They help them make an investment in the community. If there are no facilities to bring them off the streets, they fail to identify with the community and delight in being outlaws and outsiders. Inevitably (since man is a communal animal) they form their own community in gangs on street corners where they begin to cause trouble at an early age.

The lack of community activities for kids is always a problem even in times of prosperity, but in recent years, under the Tories, this loss of even the few facilities that were there is catastrophic. Youth clubs, youth workers, after-school programmes, sports events and so on have closed all around the community due to over-savage cuts.

Kids must be given opportunities for letting off steam in a controlled space. Without these they will do it in antisocial and then lawless ways, and this breeds greater lawlessness. In time you have bred criminals. I live in Worthing where there is only one decent sized leisure centre on the outskirts of town. Youths have nowhere else to go other than a poor bowling alley and a very small snooker club. Even the entertainment facilities are poor. Yet Worthing is the largest town in the county. This is asking for trouble and thus the level of youth crime and antisocial behaviour has been steadily rising for years. However, some urban housing estates in large conurbations have nothing at all. This is a breeding ground for trouble.

Poverty & anger at privileged classes

It is noteworthy that one looter was identified as a young mother who stole baby clothes from a trashed store. Clearly this person must have been relatively poor. Her first concern was not jewellery or a plasma TV but what she needed.

There is no doubt that under the Labour government the divide between the rich and the poor was greatly widened. The rich got a great deal richer but the poor got poorer. Social mobility was reduced, and that by a socialist government. The cuts brought in by Cameron only worsened this already delicate situation. Add to this the sheer national anger that the reason for the cuts was the greed of bankers, hand-in-hand with politicians who deregulated their conduct, and you have a clear reason for outbursts of frustration. This does not excuse criminality but it helps understand why it boiled over. It also explains why 'posh' shops were often targeted.

A word should also be made about the materialism of modern society. Politicians have encouraged this materialism in order to create a boom over the last 15 years, a boom hanging on the thread of massive personal and national debt. Impressionable kids are bombarded by the media with incitement to need all the trimmings of modern society – a I-phone, an I-pad, a computer (indeed modern schooling can't work without one), the best trainers, the best watch, the best clothes for your gang, bling (gaudy jewellery), and so on. All these are very expensive and kids living on £39 a week have no hope of getting anything legitimately. Thus many turn to crime; it is easy to see why nine-year-olds get £30 a day acting as runners for drug dealers. There is an underclass in British society which feels that it is acceptable to gain 'necessary' possessions through illegal means since there is a fight between the rich and the poor. Stealing trainers from a shop makes these people feel like Robin Hood rather than robbers. Their poverty trap has led them to accept an immoral position without any qualms of conscience. Since their upbringing has failed to instil a desire to work hard to get what you want, they choose immorality on the false basis that they deserve these things since other people have them.

Most of these kids are missing vital things to fit them for society: many have no fathers, most have no proper upbringing, most have no education, most have no place to let off steam or occupy themselves, most have no job and no prospects of one, most have no positive role models, all have no decent authority figures. Add to this no money and you can understand the frustration lying behind youths that turn to delinquency. Christians who don't understand any of this need to see films like, 'Kidulthood', 'Adulthood' and 'Harry Brown'.

Miscellaneous

There are a number of other relevant features which we could develop but which require complete sections on their own and cannot be expounded here, such as the widespread abuse of drugs, casual sex, self loathing, peer pressure, gang mentality and so forth.

The liberal, politically correct, agenda that has dominated the last 20 years of British political and social life is now seen to be bust and must be formally thrown overboard.

The specific background to the rioting – what sort of reasons are there for this?*Mindless thugs*

Many people have condemned the rioters as mindless thugs. Yet we have to ask the question why such large numbers of mindless thugs can suddenly operate in an organised fashion around the whole country. What is wrong with the country to generate hordes of mindless thugs? I think we have pointed to some of the reasons.

Operation Trident

Many youth workers have made the point that this London operation has targeted young black people and caused significant harassment which has, in turn, led to a great deal of anger. When innocent people are continually stopped and searched without cause there will eventually be a backlash. One young black teenager on Newsnight stated that he had been stopped and searched over 20 times and it consequently made him very angry and he hated the police. Another on Question Time, who had a good education and a job, also affirmed that the police had repeatedly stopped him. This only breeds trouble and generates anger at the police and government.

The sense of unfairness in the closure of services and cuts in benefits

A key reason (though not an excuse) for the boiling up of anger and frustration of young people is the termination of so many youth services, especially in London. Closure of youth clubs, leisure centres and other services, force kids out on to the street with nothing to do. It is a foolish cut to make.

Mervyn King, governor of the bank of England, warned David Cameron some time ago that the savage cuts would lead to social unrest. Cameron was warned. When young people have their benefit cut and housing allowance impeded, or when young single mothers have benefits cut stopping them working, or where the EMA grant cancellation has stopped willing students from going to college, there will be a growing resentment amongst the poor. Add to this closure of youth services and growing resentment against the rich nearby and it is no wonder that anger has been fuelled to boiling point. Many rioters have openly stated that their anger was directed at the rich, and in general the targets of violence were up-market stores and restaurants in affluent areas close to poor ones [not all].

Joy

Though it is disturbing to consider, it is a simple fact that the wanton destruction and looting of the insurrection was a cause of great excitement and pleasure to the rioters. They got a big rush from it. This is proved by the mobile phone videos of the mayhem. Youths stand laughing at windows being smashed in and are clearly thrilled by setting buildings on fire. Causing anarchy empowers and says that you are more powerful than the police you hate. Make no mistake; people do this because they enjoy it. Bill Buford in his book on football hooligans, *Among the Thugs*, noted that the violence was very pleasurable. This shows the level of amorality of the rioters – mindless joy in violence and mayhem.

Disturbing facts about the conduct of the riots

Police inactivity on 8 August

The overwhelming complaint of riot victims was police inactivity. In many cases people witnessed thuggery, arson and looting for two hours before any police arrived at the scene (e.g. Clapham). When they arrived the police formed a line and did nothing, allowing the looting to continue brazenly. On 9 August rioting began again in West Bromwich (Birmingham) in broad daylight (3pm) which was filmed. The fully armoured police formed a line facing the rioting group but did not charge. Instead the rioters were allowed to continue causing damage and setting fires. One sustained baton charge would have disrupted the riot and finished it off. The police continually failed in their obligation to stop crime and restore law and order; they stood doing nothing. This is undeniable, despite later support of the actions by senior policemen.

It has been said that the police were scared to be too aggressive after the prosecution of an officer for attacking a man, who subsequently died, during the 'kettling' of London G20 protestors last year. Firstly, this is simplistic and secondly it is untrue; note the video of two police officers repeatedly hitting a single man with batons in Manchester this week. It appears to me (and many others) that the reality is that the police are just plain scared of the numbers. It is accepted that the morale of the police is at rock bottom due to the threatened cuts. In that condition many officers appear to feel de-motivated to put their life at risk. It is easy for police officers to harass, threaten and hit largely peaceful protestors in a 'kettling' situation where there is comparatively little resistance, but something else when they are faced with an angry mob of youths with fire bombs and sticks. If this is the case, bring in the army to deal with it. Have platoons of army personnel at readiness to be brought in to deal with public disorders of this level.

By 11 August it emerged that a key problem was the wrong instructions from a high level of police command. Frightened by the outcome of excessive force against innocent people at the G20 protests, which was largely a peaceful demonstration, police commanders had warned officers to hold back and trust that CCTV would identify criminals. This explains why the police stood watching while crimes were committed. The wrong rules were applied to the wrong situation. Despite this, that senior officers on the ground did not countermand this instruction in the face of blatant criminality is also shocking. The job of the police is to prevent or stop crime and catch criminals; of first importance is the security of the streets; this responsibility was abrogated for three nights. This should be called to account.

Media manipulation

The BBC coverage turned out to be very selective for some reason. There were very many more riots than stated in their reports, both in terms of urban districts and towns. There were no report of riots in Hastings, the Merton district of London or the Solihull and Northfield districts of Birmingham for instance on 8 August. On the rioting on 9 August there was no mention of Sparkbrook or Northfield in Birmingham or the Medway towns. Mention was made of Gloucester, Wolverhampton, Bristol and Woolwich but without significant reporting. Neither was there any mention of Reading, Banbury, Slough or High Wycombe. On 10 August Channel 4 news told us that Leicester police forces had been overwhelmed; BBC News 24 failed to mention this at all. In all, 22 London boroughs were eventually affected but media attention was concentrated upon Tottenham, Croydon, Ealing and Clapham. Tweeters were complaining that no one was reporting incidents in their towns. Yet Al Jazeera was supplying better information. Why is that?

Vigilantes

There was much debate about the use of vigilantes where groups of people felt obliged to gather to protect their community. In some cases this clearly worked. In Ashford the police were gathered in strength to protect a shopping mall but had left other parts of the town vulnerable. A local biker gang gathered in force with dogs and patrolled round one vulnerable area and stopped any criminal activity. Sikhs armed with baseball bats outside a Southall (London) temple scared any rioters from attacking it; Turkish traders in Dalston (London) were similarly effective. Many other local men gathered in force to protect their community, as there was no police presence at all. However, in Winson Green (Birmingham) a group of law-abiding Asian locals were protecting their street when a stolen car mounted the kerb and ran into them killing three young men.

The problem is that if local groups of community volunteers have gathered in many parts of the country to protect their area, then the police services are insufficient to deal with the scope of this problem.

Targeting of authority symbols

On the night of 8 August Lavender Hill police station was besieged by scores of youths and the men inside were powerless to do anything but wait it out. This was like a scene from the film 'Assault on Precinct 13'. On the night of the 9 August a police station in Nottingham was firebombed. This demonstrates a new level of fearlessness amongst rioters.

Targeting of affluent streets

Some of the youths involved in the uprising have spoken about their anger at the rich. This anger was clearly vented in the targets of looting and torching. The shops in Ealing Broadway being a case in point; or Debenhams in Clapham or the furniture store in Croydon.

Lack of fear of police

Repeatedly we saw pictures of gangs of youths facing policed lines in a stand-off with the police clearly uncertain what to do. Occasionally there was a small uncoordinated charge by the police but only for a few yards before falling back. In Manchester police would harry gangs outside the Arndale Centre who would then run down a side street only to re-appear at the Arndale Centre minutes later. At one point there were a 1,000 youths attacking the police, whose numbers were greatly diminished by bussing riot officers to London that were not needed. Witnesses stated that the police were overrun by rioters until reinforcements arrived later. Mancunians were very angry about this since the result was massive looting and fires; more than hundred business were affected.

Clearly the police, nationally, have insufficient resources to deal with this level of uprising. By 10 August over 1,000 people had been arrested. Since that will be only a very small proportion of the number of insurgents, we can extrapolate the scale of this uprising. A significant proportion of British youth has decided to undertake criminal acts that have led to five deaths and widespread destruction. One youth stated that even if he was caught it would be a first offence and he had nothing to fear. Others feel that even if they get imprisoned, they have nothing else to live for and at least they would get fed, housed, and provided for; it also becomes a badge of honour for gang members.

Another new event is the unusual unification of gangs. London has about 200 gangs and these are usually violently opposed to each other. In the recent riots it became clear that these gangs united against the police and authority structures and used their strength of numbers to steal with impunity. The resultant power adrenaline rush also led to wanton

destruction as an expression of power and control. What is worrying is that this lesson has now been learned – if the gangs unite and target an area, they can overwhelm the police at any time who cannot mobilise as fast.

Social networking

A significant new feature of social disruption revealed in this insurgency is the use of mobile phones. There have been clear signs of organisation and strategic operations to confound the police and networks have been used to organise this. Some was effected by Twitter, but the criminal activity has been largely undertaken by using the Blackberry coded message system that is not accessible to the public domain. Using this tool, organisers have encouraged various gangs to join them at a predetermined location and have also used them to reorganise numbers at a different spot once the police arrived in force. The swift mobilisation of renegade forces in this way is a new feature.

This factor also caused anger in that the police were not aware about the threat. A man on Question Time stated that his daughter knew at 1pm, via Twitter, that a riot would occur in Enfield at 3pm, which it did. Apparently many young people were aware of this and began warning people. Despite this ‘common knowledge’ the police did not turn up for a long time after the riot began. What is worse is that in many cases the police did not turn up even after 999 calls. Many stated that no one even answered their 999 calls. That the police look at Twitter is proved by formal messages sent to Twitter by the police this week warning criminals that they would be caught.

It is also noticeable that, certainly in London, riots occurred in areas with good communications. Ealing Broadway appears to have been chosen because it was affluent but also had two tube lines and an overland rail line. Large numbers can travel to and from with ease.

What is it that we are to learn from all this?

We have seen some of the underlying causes of this criminal behaviour, we have enumerated things that lead up to outbursts like this (though these are not an excuse), but what is the purpose behind God allowing it and what should we do?

The secular situation

I have no confidence that any of this will happen since society is set on a slippery slope in hostility to God that will flower into the persecuting world government we see in Scripture; it also has no money. However, for what it’s worth -

1. *Police numbers and tactics need to be reconsidered* immediately. It is clear that if thugs wish to mobilise in numbers they can overrun police without difficulty. When sufficient numbers of police arrive, they can then mobilise somewhere else or go home to return the next day somewhere else. There had been problems in Manchester and Birmingham so police were warned. Instead riot police were ferried to London and the worst rioting and deaths occurred in these cities where the police were overrun.
2. *Provision must be made for youth facilities* to harness the frustration of teenagers sitting on the fence who have not yet joined gangs. This must be especially provided in difficult estates.
3. *Gang cultures must be infiltrated by undercover police* operatives, evidence gathered, leaders identified and arrests made before large scale gang criminality arises again.

4. *The sappy, wishy-washy, liberal agendas that have prevailed in the education system must stop immediately.* Instead, proper discipline must be re-introduced in schools.
5. *Many more vocational courses* must be introduced to deal with students who have no academic ability. Consideration should be given to technical colleges in big urban areas where un-academic but technologically-minded children can go instead of a comprehensive.
6. *Bring back grammar schools* and separate out the gifted. Bring back gender based schools and separate out the sexes (young boys find it much more difficult to express themselves than girls and suffer in their education by their embarrassment). [Note that many of these suggestions are merely bringing back the sort of education that existed in the 50s and worked.]
7. *A new support system for young parents*, especially single parents, must be introduced immediately. Many of the offenders are from single-parent families whose mother was from a broken home. These people know nothing about the security of family life or even how to bring up children in the most basic way. If nothing is done a new generation of amoral thugs will appear within 20 years that will have access to even better technology and be even more angry.
8. *Parenting should be audited* in the sense that if a child causes anti-social problems there is a dis-benefit to the parents, perhaps a fine. Young children must also face the responsibility of their actions, which in severe cases has even led to deaths (note the continual antisocial behaviour that led to the recent double-suicide of a mother and daughter). This means real punishment not just ASBOs. Young offenders must be discouraged from progressing in crime.
9. *Establish much more comprehensive apprenticeship schemes.* Reward business that set these up.
10. *Consider re-introducing conscription* to the army for youths on long-term benefits.
11. *Punishments must fit the crime.* Looters must be made to make recompense for their crimes, in terms of repayment of costs and manual labour in the communities they destroyed. This would be far better than imprisonment. However, those involved in serious crimes, such as arson and affray, must receive heavy custodial sentences. Eviction from council tenancies of the family of rioters is draconian, although it has just been enacted by Wandsworth council. It may be that the parent(s) are doing everything they can to control a rebellious teenager; such folk should not be made to suffer homelessness.

The Christian situation

God has demonstrated his anger at the iniquity in this nation for many years. This has been evidenced in numerous ways, such as floods, high winds causing massive damage, drought, various unusual weather events (a tornado in Birmingham ripped up several rooftops and wrecked a couple of streets a few years ago), disappointing summers, financial meltdown, terrorist attacks, and many other things. The recent rioting is further evidence that divine patience is running out. If Britain does not deal with its inherent governmental unrighteousness, where sin is legalised and encouraged, the judgments will become even more severe, perhaps even resulting in a war which we will lose and be overrun, the most severe form of divine judgment other than supernatural conflagration or an astronomical event.

In the past praying, godly Christians have alleviated national sins and ensured God's continuing patience; for instance in the Great Awakening when the nation's sins were considerable. Some sociologists claim that widespread conversions in this time prevented England from falling into the kind of revolution seen in France in 1789. What is significant today is that the church is in a dire state and is making matters worse. There has never

been a time in church history when the British church was in such a terrible mess. The Charismatic Movement has virtually destroyed all the benefits of evangelicalism gained in previous centuries. Heresies abound to such a degree that hardly anyone knows what the genuine Christian Gospel is anymore. Every wind of demonic doctrine flows throughout the churches causing destruction on all sides. Aberrations of practice are so serious that there are churches where there is little distinction between what they do and what Hindus or witch-doctors do.

In the late 19th century JC Ryle bewailed the state of the church and feared for its future. In the 1940s Arthur Pink stated that the church was in apostasy and that genuine believers would be better off at home meeting as best they could. Yet today we look back to those days as being far better than today. Ryle and Pink would turn in their graves if they could see what was going on in the name of Christ today. They would not believe it to be possible that such apostasy could reign in the church.

In this situation the gravity of the state of the nation is worsened by the lack of godliness in the church. Where there is no true preaching of the truth there is only going to be bondage to all sorts of wickedness. The truth makes people free; the absence of the truth imprisons people in sin. Thus there is no alleviation of the national secular problems by the testimony of Christians. Both the professing church and the nation are going to hell together in a hand-basket.

What this means is that those who claim to hold on to the truth, those who seek to serve Christ as Lord and to honour his word, have to get out of the corrupt situations around them and make an innovative new stand. Unless your church is really honouring God and preaching the truth, people need to form new churches in houses where the true Gospel is preached and where genuine principles of Christian fellowship can be practised. Within these godly communities, the local believers need to pray for their own wider communities, seeking to do good to all around them as far as possible. Only this is going to make a real difference and God may even yet spare Britain from the coming conflagration, or at least diminish its effects. The true church must begin to leaven society again instead of trying to copy it.

What is certain is that the status quo is of no use in averting God's judgment. Christians are fiddling while Rome burns; contending for their little shibboleths and fighting their denominational corners. Brothers, the recent rioting is showing us that the time is short and that things are far spent. We don't have time for petty differences on unimportant arguments but must stand together for what we believe in together – Christ is Lord and his coming kingdom will have no end. Our differences can be worked through in fellowship, but first we must have proper fellowship in local churches meeting in homes affecting local society through prayer and good works.

What is God doing in permitting these riots? He is first warning the government that it has lost its way and must begin to make radical changes in society. But further, God is telling the church that it must stop contemplating its navel, must focus upon the truth and take hold of its commission to preach the Gospel effectively; that it must build churches that operate Biblically which must reach out to the lost. Whether we succeed or fail, God will be glorified.