

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 16th APRIL 2018

Good Morning,

In 1947 Winston Churchill wrote a short story called 'The Dream'. In it he imagined his dead father appearing to him while he's painting his portrait. His father, Lord Randolph, quizzes him about the state of the world. "Has there been a war?" he enquires. "We've had nothing else but wars since democracy took charge." Churchill replies. "Wars and rumours of wars ever since you died."

His father also asks about the state of British institutions including the Monarchy and the Church of England. The Church, Churchill says, stands, 'like a light house over a stormy ocean, (marking) the entrance to a port wherein ... the masses ... wearied with the woes of the world ... may seek for that peace which passeth all understanding.'

This dream came to my mind as people of faith wonder whether religion has any special insight to offer as the West wrestles with its conscience in knowing how to respond to the Syrian atrocities.

Does faith shine like an ocean lantern on the decision making process or does it simply offer shelter from the harsh realities of the world?

Later today in the House of Commons the Prime Minister will report to MPs and trigger a debate about the accountability of the Executive to Parliament. There'll no doubt be references to the Royal Prerogative and to our Constitution.

In the appeal to how our society is constituted it's often said that we operate by an unwritten constitution. But there's a document in our history that defines the source of power and the relationship between the Head of State and Parliament, the Judiciary and even the Church. It spells out the principles of justice and mercy that govern those who exercise power nationally and internationally. I'm not talking about the Magna Carta. I'm referring to the Coronation Service.

The one drawback to the Queen's long reign is that those under 65 have never seen the Service grip the nation's soul nor heard the pledges that lie at its heart. Although the word is nowhere to be found in the text the central idea is one of human 'accountability' - to God.

The decisions being made at the moment have consequences way beyond the borders of Syria. Faith can make us aware that leaders are accountable not just to the people but to the people's Creator who, according to Jesus, we meet in the dispossessed. That doesn't make the decisions any easier but it can be an antidote to arrogance which is the real enemy of peace.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE