

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 22ND DECEMBER 2018

Good Morning

I've done it only once. Question Time. It's true. You don't get to see the questions beforehand. As you listen to the first one you think, 'I don't know anything about that!' 'hope he doesn't ask me first', then you hear the Chair call your name! The mention of it shuts down your brain and your voice makes sounds you've never heard before!

My downfall came with a question about Chlamydia! But the ever skilful chair turned it into a debate about the Church of England's attitude to gay sex. The other panellists were unanimous that the Church was wrong. I was left to defend it - which I did badly!

I was rescued by the audience as the programme came from Liverpool where I was bishop. Even though most of them agreed with the other panellists they were gentle with me – the sort of solidarity that you get in that city.

One of the virtues of Question Time like its sister programme Any Questions is that it goes around the United Kingdom and into different regions. As today's Guest Editor put it at the end of his last programme it gives local people their 'democratic right to put questions to those on the Panel'.

This so-called 'right' to challenge those in authority is almost religious. It's an article of faith. It's a belief that's been worked out over the centuries and chiselled into our hearts through civil strife, protest movements and even wars.

Philosophers and theologians can argue about its origin; but audiences turn up religiously with a conviction that they have a right to question.

Not that everybody with power wants to be questioned. I'm struck by the seemingly increasing number of people who tell this programme that 'no-one is available' for interview.

Still running at the British Museum is Ian Hislop's exhibition on dissent and subversion called 'I object'. The blurb argues that 'questioning authority and registering protest' ... 'are an integral part of what makes us human'. It's the fuel to make progress.

Interesting to me is the fact that the very first conversation Jesus had in the Gospels is of him putting questions to those in authority. It got him into deep water with his parents. But he defended himself by implying that it was in his nature.

And if he's the revelation of God which Christians celebrate this Christmas, it's possible to see God as the source not only of all of our answers but of all our questioning too.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE