

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 30TH APRIL 2018

Good Morning,

Today is the anniversary of the Inauguration of the first President of the United States of America – George Washington in 1789.

American Presidents often seem made in the image of their culture. Washington and Eisenhower were both soldiers who came to the fore in a time of war; Kennedy and the Bushes reflect America's love of dynasties; Reagan was a projection of the Hollywood era; and Donald Trump?

When I was in America recently I was sitting in a vast hotel lounge. At every single table around me people were doing deals. Millions of dollars transacted over coffee. Here was the entrepreneurial culture in action. Suddenly it didn't feel so strange that they'd elected an entrepreneur to be their President.

But every night across all the news channels ran stories about the President's private life. A big interview with the Porn Star, Stormy Daniels, was followed by studio clashes between her attorney and a lawyer defending the President.

Over the next ten weeks we can expect even more scrutiny here of Donald Trump's presidency as he prepares to come for a 'working visit'.

One of the questions that underpins all such debates is whether or not an individual's personal behaviour affects their effectiveness in public office.

Way back in our own history when politics and religion were more intertwined this same question gnawed away. The world and the church were blighted by some corrupt bishops and priests.

Buried in the annals of the Church of England are the 39 Articles of Religion. They are, to this day, its foundational documents.

Article 26 has this heading: “Of the unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the sacrament”. In other words, even if the priests are rogues, when they give Christians the bread and the wine they’re still the body and blood of Christ. The power of these religious symbols does not depend on the personal integrity of the minister.

This rule from the 16th Century introduced to our society over 400 years ago the idea that you could divide the person from the role, and the office from its holder.

So when a person comes representing a country, be they a monarch, ambassador or president, it’s the office that commands our attention, and not the person who holds it.

That subtle distinction is vital to diplomacy for the truth is that at every level of society no-one’s life can withstand total public scrutiny.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE

