

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY MONDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2018

Good Morning,

Yesterday saw the start of the Trade Union Congress and the opening of the Conference season. For the rest of the month the news will be dominated by politicians. The political fortunes of various personalities seem to many to resemble a real life soap opera. And amidst the torrent of words there'll be debate about policies that will write the script for the next generation. Throughout all of this not only politicians but the whole political class will come under greater scrutiny.

I sense a weariness in the air.

At the launch of his radio series last week on Morality in the 21st Century Rabbi Lord Sacks spoke about the place of 'honour' in public life. He referred to the eulogy given at Senator John McCain's Memorial Service by Henry Kissinger.

'Honour' Kissinger said, 'is an intangible quality, not obligatory. It has no code. It reflects an inward compulsion free of self-interest. It fulfils a cause, not personal ambition'. Kissinger, well into his nineties, is a veteran politician who served several presidents including Richard Nixon. He's known both honour and dishonour in politics.

At the end of his third and final volume of memoirs, Kissinger tells a story about his father who had led the family out of Nazi Germany to the safe haven of America. While Henry Kissinger was serving in the US Army in Europe his father fell ill and had to undergo major surgery from which he was not expected to recover. He penned a letter for his two sons in case he died.

In it he laid down the principles by which they should live.

“Do always your duty toward your mother ... to your relatives, to the Jewish community, to this great country, to yourselves.”

Then having expressed his confidence in God to protect them both, he ended,

“Always keep in mind that we find real satisfaction only in what we are doing for others. Try always to be good, faithful, helpful, reliable, selfless”.

As it happened his father lived another 36 years and long enough to judge whether or not his son had abided by this advice. But the letter laid down the principle of honour in public life.

In the prevailing weariness about our current political dramas I sense, admittedly not everywhere, but in many quarters, a sighing that the political class and the media might manifest more – to use a phrase of St Paul – ‘whatever is honourable’.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE