

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY MONDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018

Good morning.

September 3<sup>rd</sup>, today, was the day that Oliver Cromwell died. There's a statue of him outside the Houses of Parliament. Even now people are divided in their opinions of him. To some he's a champion of parliamentary democracy; to others a ruthless zealot. But he stands in our country's history as a pivotal figure of a time when the nation was bitterly divided along both political and religious lines. Interestingly, although he was cruel to Catholics it was Cromwell who oversaw the resettlement of Jews in England.

Our history, every nation's history, seems to be on a loop where intense division is followed by a period of resolution only then to give way to another chapter of tension.

Which is where we find ourselves today over Brexit. Not only is the nation divided, the two major political parties are split and many individuals are divided within themselves swaying from one side to the other and back again.

The figure of Cromwell and the battles of the Civil Wars nearly 400 years ago make me wonder whether we can look into our history and find clues about how to resolve our current differences. The Wars featured the same characteristics that dominate every era – strong personalities, rival loyalties, spontaneous events, passionately held convictions – and, what Napoleon told his generals, 'luck'.

At the end of Blair Worden's book on 'The English Civil Wars' he quotes a poem by John Dryden who in 1700 muses on the closing century and all the blood that was shed, 'Thy wars brought nothing about'.

Of course, that's not how those warriors at the time saw it as they fought for their loyalties and their lives. Nor do I imagine is it what our present protagonists think as they take their battles to the airwaves.

But there's a question that gnaws away – given that history reveals a cycle of conflict giving way to resolution, is there any way in a more civilised world that we can achieve the stability without the preceding tension?

The eye of faith imagines an answer that is both disturbing and reassuring. Disturbing, because in many faiths, not least the Christian one, selfishness and even evil can infect the noblest ambitions. Reassuring, because faith sees that we're all bound on a path where the loop of conflict, peace and conflict is finally broken; and where the forces of reconciliation will one day have their day.

It's a mind set to cool the fiercest political and religious passions.

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