

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY MONDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> January 2024

Good Morning,

It's not surprising that the Post Office Horizon scandal is still making the headlines.

In the House of Commons Dame Diana Johnson compared the fate of the Sub-postmasters to that of the Hillsborough Families. She referred to a Report I wrote called, 'The Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power', which sums up what both groups have endured over the years.

The Government responded to that Report just before Christmas. One of the recommendations was a Charter for those bereaved through public tragedy. By signing it national institutions would 'place the public interest above (protecting their) own reputation' and would 'avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or dismiss and disparage those who have suffered'.

The Government itself signed this Charter last month on December 6<sup>th</sup>. It now seems relevant for the Post Office.

Over the last 20 years I've listened to many who've been badly treated – from Hillsborough to the Infected Blood community, from Grenfell Tower to the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. So many have a story of being patronised by officials who've exercised their power without any sense of being accountable.

The public sometimes mistakes the mood of victims as one of seeking revenge. But, in my experience, that happens only in a very small number of cases.

What I've observed is something both deeply human and profoundly spiritual. When you've been wronged publicly it's nigh impossible to

re-build your life until someone takes responsibility for the wrongdoing. When that wrong is righted publicly only then can a person be set free.

On a spiritual level, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, from Adam to Jesus, it's a story of human accountability to God. Jesus chided leaders for neglecting not just the love of God but his justice.

But here we meet a paradox. Although we look for accountability and justice in this life many of us feel less comfortable with the idea of a God who judges US. I imagine because most of us know how that would end.

That's why the idea of God's forgiveness is so appealing.

Yet the path to being forgiven lies in the logic that forgiveness follows on only when you acknowledge that you've actually done something which is wrong.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE