

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – THURSDAY, 9<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2025  
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Good morning.

The criminal justice system is under increasing strain, and policymakers are seeking ways of dealing with a growing backlog in the courts. Delays in trial and sentencing mean that victims of crime suffer prolonged psychological anguish as they wait for justice, and innocent people sometimes languish in prison, waiting to clear their names.

The plight of prisoners is a frequent theme in the Bible. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus repeats the words of the prophet Isaiah, saying he has been sent to proclaim freedom for prisoners and to set the oppressed free. He was a victim of what today we would call a miscarriage of justice, an innocent man crucified not for any crime or act of violence, but because he posed a threat to the political and religious powers of his time.

Those who commit crimes must be held accountable, but a properly functioning legal system is the sine qua non of a just and fair society. When we see that people are being denied justice either as victims or accused, we need to ask ourselves hard questions about our shared values, the extent of our freedoms, and the limits of our demands for protection. There is a delicate and difficult balance to be maintained between liberty and security, legality and suppression. This calls for vigilance and, sometimes, resistance in relation to the law.

The preservation of social justice means distinguishing between laws that are intended for the protection and good of society, and those that serve the interests of the rich and powerful by denying ordinary people's freedoms and rights. A tragically recurring theme throughout history is the extent to which tyrannies and dictatorships arise through the corruption of laws. The maxim, 'an unjust law is no law at all', is threaded through western theology and jurisprudence. We cannot uphold society's fragile defences and protections unless we insist that the law serves justice, not power, and that means identifying laws that are, in effect, no laws at all.

To quote another famous saying, this time by Martin Luther King: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice". Whatever our political or religious views in these troubled and muddled times, I believe that we have a personal and shared responsibility to remain vigilant to abuses of power in our political, religious and civil institutions. That means seeking to discern that bending towards justice, and learning to bend with it through our attentiveness to those who are failed by our society's laws and institutions.