

Life and Death - a Blessing and a Curse

Thought for the Day

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I was astonished to read the other day that one of the causes of the Crimean War, 150 years ago this month, was that when Louis Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France, the Tsar addressed him, not as his "brother" but as his "friend". Because of that *clearly unpardonable insult*, "into the valley of death rode the 600" - and countless thousands of others on both sides.

It's tempting to think civilisation has moved a long way, now that monarchs are relegated to more - *or mere* - ceremonial functions. It's hard to imagine a call to arms had our First Minister addressed Her Majesty on Saturday by an inappropriate title!

And yet, as the Queen was preparing for her visit to her new neighbours at the bottom of the Royal Mile, not much further away than the Crimea, Iraqi terrorists were setting up their cameras to broadcast to the world the gruesome and barbaric fate of Ken Bigley. Around the same time, other terrorists were driving cars laden with explosives to bring death and destruction to a hotel in Taba, which was built on land returned to Egypt by Israel.

How sad that this symbol of the peace between Israel and Egypt, should now be destroyed by the enemies of peace. It's a reminder that even today there is no shortage of dictators, tyrants, and despots to send their followers and their enemies alike to their deaths in droves.

The Talmud says, "whoever saves a life is as if they had saved the whole world". People of real faith and humanity can imagine no higher value than human life. Think of the agonising over whether her doctors must strive to keep baby Charlotte Wyatt alive. We can barely even conceive that there are others, whose supreme value is not life but death for their cause.

So this clash of cultures sets before us, as the Bible says, a choice between "life and death, a blessing and a curse". How can we do other, as a society and a civilisation, than to choose life?