



Reflection -

New year is time to look for hope

Archbishop of Canterbury

Archbishop Justin Welby gave the final Thought for the Day of 2013 on BBC Radio 4's Today programme yesterday morning. He was invited to do so by the chief executive of Barclays, Anthony Jenkins, the programme's guest editor. -

I grew up with Christmases very varied, and many of them quite lonely, so I am deeply grateful for what I have now with a large and wonderful family. Experience tells me that cruelty and misery do not take Christmas off, in fact they often do overtime. We only have to look at the carnage in Volgograd to know that.

On many of the last few days I've had contacts from the South Sudan, with people in the midst of violence or under siege. There are unremitting efforts to bring about a ceasefire and to help internally displaced people find a place of safety. These efforts spring from the hope of building a new nation in which people will flourish, in an area which has been at war for much of the last 50 years. Hope does make the world different. New Year is a time to look for hope.

Hope is very different from optimism. Thankfully, in the UK there are reasons for economic optimism. One economist has even spoken of a Lazarus economy rising from the dead. Others have different views and focus on the high levels of debt and inequality. Whoever is right optimism or pessimism are one thing, hope is quite another. It comes not from circumstances but from trust in the ultimate purposes of the world, and I believe in the purpose that God has for us to know Him, and that he has for the world.

Part of that purpose is for a society that is just, reflecting the justice of God. One of the great challenges for the coming year, especially if the economy is going better, is for our financial system: will it revert to the bad old ways of the past or continue the efforts for cultural change towards something that serves the common good? As we heard from our guest editor, Anthony

Jenkins, leadership is the issue. Leadership must have a vision based in justice and hope, so that everyone at every level is committed to change.

Hope in God sustained Jesus' family as they set off as exiles fleeing persecution. People in South Sudan trust the same God and hope for peace, and because of that hope, struggle to make it a reality. Despite setbacks such as last night, negotiations in Northern Ireland are, as one leader remarked in the late 90s, sometimes optimistic but always hopeful. Real hope springs from something deep within us, I believe something put there by God.

Hope rises above our trials and our failures, looking to a future that may be tough, even terrible, but in which the light of Christ always shines. Real hope compels us to act. A happy and hopeful New Year to all.

Justin Welby is Archbishop of Canterbury