



Assange and conspiracy

With Julian Assange's arrest, the coverage seems to be overlooking the original reason behind his arrest.

For sure, the ethical issue of the existence of Wikileaks needs to be explored, and on this I can see both sides. I can see why some things need to be kept secret in the cause of national security; I can also see why that secrecy can mask a number of crimes, which actually should be exposed. When is whistle-blowing betrayal?

But the original reason Assange faced a threat of prison was on charges of sexual misconduct in Sweden. Because it never came to court, it is murky, but two separate Swedish women claim he behaved in a sexually inappropriate way with them; the Swedish government wanted to follow it up.

At this point, Assange claimed that Sweden were in the pockets of the USA; that this was all a conspiracy to deliver him to the USA on the charges of leaking national secrets; and he headed to the Ecuadorian embassy, where he has been for the last nine years.

Two years ago, the Swedish government finally dropped their charges. I guess there's only so long you can keep something like this on the books.

But whatever the case with America, wikileaks and soldiers' behaviour in Iraq, I do know that I'd trust the Swedish legal system as much as I would the UK system or that in the USA. If he was in danger of being extradited to North Korea, then perhaps I would have

had sympathy with his case, but Sweden? What is the evidence that their courts are kangaroo ones, just looking out for a way to get in the USA's good books.

It is also noteworthy that this happened in 2010, years before the #metoo movement alerted us to the fact that an awful lot of men have touched/ groped/ raped more women than we possibly realised before. Rather than a trumped up charge, isn't it more that there was a case to answer in the case of his alleged sexual misconduct towards two women. Maybe he was innocent; right now, we don't know, because Assange refused to go to court and prove it.

It is in his refusal to go to trial in Sweden that I stop seeing reason and the sword of truth behind Assange's behaviour, and instead I start seeing a warped view of the world, where everyone is out to get you

For sure, true whistle blowers are invariably somewhat rebarbative characters. Run of the mill people are likely to drift along with the direction of the wind and are less likely to challenge or protest, because they don't like making trouble. In accounts of martyrs in the English reformation, invariably these people are extreme types; as official religion changed, most of the population just drifted along, and made accommodation. It took immense willpower to refuse to change your stance and so they are the ones who paid with their lives. So I know that you can't expect Assange to be an easy man. I still wish he'd gone to Sweden.

April 2019 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.