

Jock Tamson's bairns

Thought for the Day

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Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 31 March 2016

Last week I spoke at a conference on Hate Crime and Prejudice organised by the Lord Advocate and the Chief Constable, and was very struck by two things. The first is the depressing similarity of the experience of all minority groups – not just those defined by race or religion, but disability and gender issues too – and particularly the sad fact that most people regard name-calling, bullying, and harassment as just a fact of life, and don't even protest or report it. But what was far more encouraging is the determination of the authorities in Scotland to put a stop to it.

Within an hour of the latest horrific terrorist attack in Brussels, the First Minister spoke proudly of the diversity of her own constituency, which was once home to a large Jewish Community – including me! She said the increase in hatred against Islam and Judaism is “completely unacceptable”, adding “I don't want to be the First Minister, or even live, in a country where Jewish people want to leave or hide their identity“. For me, the fact that all the main political parties share this commitment to “One Scotland of many cultures” is real and reassuring.

I'm struck also by how history repeats itself! Yesterday I was at a meeting looking back at the experience of Jewish refugees who came here more than a century ago – and today I have another about how we can welcome today's new arrivals from Syria and elsewhere. I can only say that I hope they get a better welcome than some of our grandparents got 100 years ago. The signs are promising, with many touching tales of communities taking newcomers to their hearts. One lovely story I heard just yesterday is of a community that helped newly arrived refugee children to buy the ‘right’ shoes so they would fit in at school.

Scots say we're all Jock Tamson's bairns, so let's show the world we know what that means!

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