

## **Belief is strengthened by challenge**

### *Thought for the Day*

*Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)*

*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 22 October 2003*

I suppose if there's only one genuinely world-class item of religious news from Scotland this morning, it's the red hat awarded to Archbishop Keith O'Brien in the Vatican yesterday. On days like these one doesn't have to be either a Catholic or a nationalist to feel a frisson of pride when Scotland plays on an international stage, and I am delighted to join representatives from many other faiths in welcoming Cardinal O'Brien's elevation to the College of Cardinals, and wishing him success.

Obviously it is not for members of one faith to pass comment on the internal affairs of another, but at a purely personal level I've always found the new Cardinal compassionate, humorous and likeable, while firm in his own faith. And that really is the point of inter-faith dialogue. If we were out to convert one another it would not be dialogue, but discord! The fact that we know at the outset that we will never agree - or rather that we will only ever agree to disagree - does not mean that we cannot explore and seek better to understand our differences.

Of course, argument can be a blunt instrument of persuasion, but discussion and debate can also be valuable for their own sake – however unfashionable it may be to say so. Being prepared to listen does not imply being prepared to agree; being prepared to understand does not imply being prepared to concede.

Cardinal O'Brien was quoted yesterday as saying that the Roman Catholic church is not a democracy. Neither is Judaism – and yet argument and debate are part of our tradition. If the doctrine of rationalism is that the unexamined life is worthless, then the doctrine of Judaism is that unexamined faith means little. Just as honesty is strengthened by temptation, so belief is strengthened by challenge. And if that is so, the dialogue I have been privileged to share with the new Cardinal has weakened neither, but strengthened us both.