

## **The weave that holds the cloth together**

### *Thought for the Day*

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*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 26 October 2006*

“Faith matters” – that was the title of an interfaith dialogue I attended yesterday in Glasgow’s unique St Mungo museum of religion.

And yes, faith does matter! - We see that almost every day on the front pages of our newspapers. It matters locally when mosques or synagogues are fire-bombed, and when people wearing religious forms of dress are attacked in the street. It obviously matters nationally when government ministers find it necessary to make public and controversial pronouncements. And it matters internationally when rogue states threaten to wipe others off the face of the earth for no other reason than their religion.

But just think: would the world not be a poorer place if everything were the same colour? Would you bother eating if everything tasted the same? Or reading if every book told the same story?

Would society be better off if everyone had the same beliefs, desires, tastes? Of course not! Why do we go on foreign holidays if not to sample at least a little of the diversity of human experience? So why then do some people object when some of that same diversity comes to visit us?

One of the striking things about the recent furore about religious clothing is its superficiality: why on earth do *clothes* matter? – as if we’d prefer anarchists in a suit and tie to responsible members of society in a veil!

We all use badges – literal and metaphorical – to express some of our many identities. We have club ties, lapel pins, team colours, supposedly secret handshakes, and so on – and we use these to build a whole network of commonalities with others. Yes they mark differences, but difference in itself is not threatening. The threat arises only when extremists elevate one identity and seek to eliminate all the others.

So let’s recognise their extremism for what it is, and embrace diversity – whether of clothing, or belief, or diet, or whatever. Let’s prefer pattern to uniformity, and see that it is actually the weave that holds the cloth together.