

Attitudes Change, Behaviour Follows

Thought for the Day

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Yesterday's good news was the huge reduction in recorded crime in Scotland – now at its lowest for almost 40 years. That follows the announcement at the weekend that charges for sectarian behaviour are down almost a third on last year.

Of course one incident is one too many, so it's very welcome that the authorities are not resting on their laurels. In fact as soon as the religious hatred statistics published, the Community Safety Minister personally phoned representatives of the various faith communities; and just yesterday, we met the First Minister to discuss the implications.

Inevitably, we discussed the less good news. Sectarianism may be down, but both islamophobia and antisemitism are up. For a football phobic like me, it was bizarre to hear the fall in sectarian crime explained by the tribulations of Rangers FC: fewer Old Firm matches; fewer chances for trouble!

The new worry is the internet, where people think they can hurl insults in the anonymous darkness of the night. But if they're daft enough to put their hatred on display, that just makes them easier to trace!

Like internet pornography – another of this week's hot topics – internet hatred is not a victimless crime. Hate mail hurts the individual recipient; hatred on public sites harms everyone who reads it. Any attack on people because of their personal characteristics affects everyone who shares those characteristics. It makes whole communities feel insecure and alienated.

Society is made up of these communities. All Jock Tamson's bairns are part of one minority or other. So we should all welcome the fact that Scotland is no longer prepared to tolerate language and behaviour that was once commonplace. As the First Minister said, the law alone cannot change society, but it sets norms that make this a better place to be. Attitudes change, and behaviour follows.

All religions teach that we should love our neighbours. That's a challenge! We don't have to like them all, but to coexist we do have to respect their difference.