

Flights of White Doves?

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

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Recently I was one of more than thirty Scots, from seven different faith communities, on a joint Pilgrimage to what three great religions recognise as the Holy Land.

We never expected to be met by flights of white doves bearing olive branches, but we went as people of faith with a more limited aim: to understand one another better; to demonstrate that mutual respect is possible without unanimity; and to prove that disagreement is possible without animosity.

We did have some success – most of those we met were surprised and impressed by the enterprise itself, by the diversity and cohesion of the group, and by our common commitment to our purpose. Many said our group was unique, and hoped we'd started a trend.

That itself was promising, and justifies our support from the Scottish Government. And it exemplifies the First Minister's vision of Scotland as a peacemaker.

Of course peace-making is a tall order! A more attainable aim is the biblical injunction to "pursue peace". That difference measures the distance between idealism and realism: very few of us are fated to make peace, but none of us has any excuse not to pursue it. Even if we fail, the reward is in the trying.

So we were not there to make peace, but to promote the possibility of peaceful coexistence. A wise man once said one can only make peace with one's enemies – you don't need to with your friends! But to do so, you first have to see them not just as enemies, but as people with their own attitudes and beliefs and ambitions. Only then can compromise emerge.

That is why the election yesterday of Tzipi Livni to lead the main party in Israel's ruling coalition gives hope. She may still have to rebuild a coalition to pursue peace with the Palestinians, but the UN's International Day of Peace on Sunday is a good time to start!

Perhaps there is still hope for that flight of white doves!

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