

## **Through the Eyes of an Elephant**

### ***Thought for the Day***

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***Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 15 March 2010***

I was recently invited to give a lecture about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and took as my title “Judaism – in bed with an elephant”. I don’t claim any originality – the metaphor was first used (as far as I know) by Pierre Trudeau to describe the relationship between Canada and the United States, and it’s since been borrowed by Scottish historians to characterise our own relationship with England. The image is compelling, but with hindsight, I’m not convinced it was right for my purpose.

Perhaps “through the eyes of an elephant” would have been better. My point was not that whenever the bigger beast turns, the smaller has to make way, or – to change the image – be dragged in its wake; the point is that in a predominantly Christian society, Judaism is seen through Christian eyes, in Christian terms, with Christian presuppositions.

So, with the best of intentions, an ecumenical group might decide to broaden their base by inviting other faiths to join them; but if they don’t change how they operate, the new members sit, alienated, as the meeting starts with Christian prayers. Or in the class room, teachers telling a Bible story may fail to realise that even the King James Version, 400 years old next year, is a translation; and that translation, as the Italians say, traduces the original – in fact even the term “Old Testament” misrepresents the Hebrew Scriptures as no more than Volume One of the Christian Bible.

Of course I don’t object to the emphasis on Christianity in our society, or even in our schools – we all need that grounding to understand, for example, the subject matter of operas or paintings. But the challenge is to remain sensitive to the diversity of the audience. ‘One size fits all’ means stretching or compressing all your visitors till they measure up to the same bed, as in the biblical story of Sodom or the Greek myth of Procrustes! People are not all the same, so treating everyone identically is the very antithesis of showing them respect.

*Ephraim Borowski*

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