

Who Will Speak Out?

Thought for the Day

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Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 4 February 2015

Looking out on this cold and frosty morning, it might not seem that spring has yet sprung, but today is in fact the official start of the agricultural year in the Jewish calendar. When I was a child, that was just another date to learn, but now communal celebrations of the New Year for Trees, as it's known, are common, with a fruitarian banquet that more than meets the demands of five a day!

That makes a welcome change after a tough few weeks for the Jewish Community. Even in Scotland – usually a welcoming environment that embraces its minorities – more antisemitic incidents were reported to the police in three months last summer than in the whole of the previous three years. The anxiety in the community was palpable in a way I can't remember ever before. And that wasn't only obvious to us – why else would the First Minister, the Lord Advocate, and the Chief Constable all issue virtually unprecedented messages of reassurance?

Then just as things seemed to be settling down, came the appalling terrorist attacks in Paris. There can be no justification for killing supposedly to avenge an idea, but killing people just because of the kind of supermarket they shop in is beyond irrational. If merely being Jewish makes you a target, why not having red hair, living in Montmartre, or being 5' 7"? But sadly some people think it does, so it could have been my local deli, me doing the shopping.

And that's just as true of anyone who's a member of any other minority of any kind – and which of us is not? Perhaps that's one of the messages of Holocaust Memorial Day last week: to paraphrase Pastor Niemöller, after the Nazis come for the Jews, and the disabled, and the Trade Unionists, and the Roma, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, who will be left to speak out? We are all in that boat. As the wise old saying has it, you can't bore a hole under your own seat and not affect others.

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