

Tackle the beginning of hatred, don't just regret where it ends

Thought for the Day

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I'm even more pleased than usual to be here today, as I spent most of last week in London in Intensive Care (or "Intensive Treatment" as it's now probably more appropriately called). There's nothing quite like the view from the Valley of the Shadow of Death for concentrating one's thoughts – for example, when a consultant says, "You're a lot more ill than you feel, you know", is that good news or bad?!

Meanwhile, the world continued to turn. Monday was Burns Night, so much of the country – indeed the world – has been viewing itself through slightly maudlin alcohol-tinted spectacles to "pray that come it may, ... That Man to Man, the world o'er, Shall brithers be for a' that." And Monday was also the so-called "New Year for Trees", once the start of the agricultural tax year in the Jewish calendar, and now celebrated in Israel as the beginning of spring.

Then the mood changes. Today is International Holocaust Memorial Day, marked by solemn ceremonies in schools and public places, in remembrance of the extermination of more than the entire population of Scotland, not because of what they did, but for who they were, and couldn't help being. We stand shoulder to shoulder, vowing "Never Again", pledging never to be bystanders – and then we watch as it happens again and again, not only in remote places but much closer to home.

Tonight the First Minister will light a candle of remembrance. Yesterday she met Jewish students to hear about their experiences of antisemitism on Scottish campuses – not two generations ago, but today, 2016, here in Scotland, Jewish students facing antisemitism.

Although it's become a cliché, it's nonetheless true that the Holocaust didn't begin with the gas chambers, but with the graffiti, the broken windows, and the name calling. So if we genuinely and sincerely want "Never Again" to be more than a pious hope, we have to tackle the beginning of hatred and not just regret where it ends.