

Listening not Shouting

Thought for the Day

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I'll freely admit that I've been praying for a quiet news day! The week began with the media still completely dominated by the terrible death toll and destruction caused by the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, with only glimmers of good news about people being rescued against all the odds after unimaginable lengths of time under the rubble.

Then, just like flicking a switch, the front pages changed in an instant with the bolt from the blue in Bute House! This is not the time or place for a political obituary for the soon-to-be-former First Minister, but what many people noted was the tone of her resignation statement – frank, good-natured, and a little bit wry, just as I've always found her in all the dealings I've had with her. Some of these have been difficult conversations about issues that made Jewish people in Scotland feel uneasy, alienated, or vulnerable. She was genuinely shocked to see with her own eyes that we need security guards at our places of worship, and to hear that some Jewish people had literally packed a suitcase in case they had to make a quick exit.

Her statement on Wednesday spoke of leadership as “a privilege but also – rightly – hard”, and of how difficult it can be for a leader to let go of the reins; and she acknowledged “the need to reach across the divide, de-polarise public debate, and reset the tone of our discourse”. I'm sure many of us, whatever our political persuasion, will say Amen to that!

Whether as individuals or communities, of course we shouldn't presume to get everything we ask for, but it's reasonable to expect a polite hearing and reasoned discussion. That cuts both ways, so let's all start with ourselves, by resolving to spend less time shouting and more time listening. We almost always have more in common with our opponents than the red mist lets us see!

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